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PAUL BOURGET

TRANSLATED BY

KATHARINE PRESCOTT WORMELEY

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# PASTELS OF MEN

## First Series




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# PASTELS OF MEN.

## I.

### A SAINT.

To Madame George S. R. T.

I was travelling in Italy in the month of October, 188–, with no other object than to get rid of a few weeks in again seeing, this time at my leisure, a number of my favorite masterpieces. The pleasure of a second impression has always been to me more vivid than that of the first; doubtless because I have ever felt the beauty of the arts as a writer, — that is to say, as a man who requires that a picture or a statue should, in the first instance, be a text for thought. Not an æsthetic reason, and one at which all painters who are painters indeed will scoff. And yet this reason alone had brought me, in the month of October of which I speak, to spend a few days at Pisa. I wished to live over again, at my ease, the dream of Benozzo Gozzoli and Orcagna. Here, in a parenthesis, let me say, so as not to seem in the eyes of connoisseurs too ignorant of art, that

I call by the name of Orcagna the painter of the "Triumph of Death" in the Campo Santo of the old town, knowing well that modern criticism questions his paternity of the work. But to me, and to all those whose memory cherishes the admirable lines of Pianto on the tragic fresco, Orcagna is, and ever will be, the sole author of it. At any rate, Benozzo has not lost, through the sceptical and fatal criticism of catalogues, his right and title to the decoration of the west wall of the cemetery.

What intense sensations have I not felt in this little corner of the world, remembering ever that Byron and Shelley lived in the ancient Tuscan town, that my dear master, M. Taine, has described the adjoining spot in the most eloquent of his eloquent pages, that the lyrical poet Pianto came here, and that Benozzo Gozzoli himself, the laborious toiler of painted poesy, lies buried at the foot of the wall on which his frescos are softly fading. In that enclosure of the Pisan Campo Santo, on the sacred earth brought thither in pious ages, I had watched the springtide calling the pale narcissi into bloom at the feet of the black cypresses; I had seen the winters shedding light flakes of snow, melted as soon as fallen; I had felt the torrid sky of an Italian summer weltering above that shadeless spot with crushing heat; and yet I had not exhausted the charm of it, for I now returned there in the

autumn of which I speak, — little expecting the moral drama in which this visit was to involve me, if not as an actor at least as a deeply interested spectator, though somewhat against my will.

The first episode of this drama was, like that of many others, a rather commonplace incident, which I nevertheless relate with pleasure, though it has but slight connection with my tale. It evokes for me the pleasant recollection of two English old maids. During my visits to the Campo Santo I had noticed this couple, who, by reason of their singular ugliness and the utilitarian oddity of their clothes, seemed a living and caricatural illustration of a certain poet's tender address to the dead: —

"Thou hast no longer sex or age."

The browner of the two (the other might possibly pass for a ruddy blonde) was vigorously washing-in a water-color presentment of the woman in the "Triumph of Death;" the one who faces you, in the cavalcade to the left, with her candid eyes and her sensitive mouth, — eyes and mouth which have never lied, and which are never forgotten when once we have loved them. The worthy Englishwoman was totally devoid of talent, but her choice of this subject and the conscientiousness of her work interested me.

Consequently, as these spinsters lived at my hotel, I had somewhat indiscreetly yielded to my curiosity so far as to look for their names on the register. I found that one was named Miss Mary Dobson, the other Miss Clara Roberts. They were about fifty years of age, and were now making that tour "abroad," as they call it, which thousands of their courageous colleagues in celibacy (forced or voluntary) undertake annually from the island shores of Great Britain. The sisterhood start in pairs, in threes, sometimes in fours. Behold them thus alone for fifteen or twenty months; installed in mysterious boarding-houses, the addresses of which are known and transmitted by the whole freemasonry of travelling spinsters; learning new languages in spite of their gray hairs; applying themselves with heroic perseverance to understand the arts; passing through evil places with their purity, which is that of the angels, untainted; ever in quest of an English church, an English cemetery, and an English chemist, — not to speak of the tea which they never fail to prepare after the British fashion in the depths of Calabria or far up the Nile at the precise hour they are in the habit of imbibing it in their drawing-rooms in Kent or Devonshire. I have such an admiration for the moral courage which lurks behind the absurd exteriors of these curious beings that in the course of my too frequent

vagabondizing I take pains to enter into conversation with them, — all the more, perhaps, because I have discovered that the passion for facts which rules their race makes them not infrequently very useful to consult. They are sure to have verified every statement in the guide-book; and whoever has wandered, Baedeker in hand, through a remote region of Italy, will readily admit that such verifications are precious. Therefore, on the third evening of my stay at Pisa, the departure of certain guests having brought my place at the table d'hôte next to that of the two old maids, I began a conversation with them, quite sure that they would not reject so good an opportunity to "practise their French."

You now see the stage-setting, do you not? — a room in an old palace transformed into a hotel dining-room, with more or less modern furniture, the ceiling frescoed in lively colors, a long dinner-table with few places laid because the winter season has not yet begun. On the table, swaying in their brass holders, are the *fiaschi*, those delightful long-necked flasks, with their bellies wrapped in osier and filled with the wine of so-called Chianti. If the little mountain of that name supplies enough to fill all the bottles which are labelled thus it certainly must yield, at the least, a harvest a week. But the false Chianti is a true and good wine, the flavor of which, though rather sharp, tastes of the

grape; and the glow of it colors the cheeks of the seven or eight persons who chance to be stranded for the time being around the table, — a German couple, making the classic wedding journey on this side the Alps; a Milanese merchant, with a face both sly and sensual; two Genoese burghers visiting the neighborhood, and now in Pisa to meet their nephew, a cavalry officer. The latter is dining at the table d'hôte in captain's uniform, dashing, jovial, and speaking in loud tones with the rather guttural accent of the Riviera. His talk, interspersed with laughter, gives me the odyssey of his parents, in which I should be more interested if Miss Mary Dobson had not suddenly broached a subject which roused me, passionate quattrocentist that I am, the lover of frescos and paintings on wood before the sixteenth century.

Miss Mary was the darker of the two spinsters, she whose water-color brushes had so flattened and dulled the rude design of the primitive master; and after a long dissertation on the problem as to whether the famous "Triumph" was to be attributed to Buonamico Buffalmaco or to Nardo Daddi she suddenly addressed me as follows: —

"Have you been to the convent of Monte-Chiaro?"

"Do you mean the one between Pisa and Lucca, on the mountain the other side of Ver-

ruca?" I replied. "Well, no; the guide-book says it takes six hours to drive there, and for two poor Luca della Robbias and a few pictures of the Bologna school which is all they mention —"

"What is the date of your guide-book?" asked Miss Clara, sharply.

"I don't know," I said, a little embarrassed by the sarcastic manner in which that mouth with its long teeth questioned me. "The fact is I have a superstition about keeping the same copy that I used when I came to Italy for the first time, — rather long ago, I must admit."

"How French that is!" returned Miss Clara.

Instantly I understood her pre-Raphaelitism; it was nothing more than one form of vanity. However, I took no notice of the international sneer, as I might have done by simply repeating the remark and emphasizing the Britannic benevolence of it. In dealing with English folk of the aggressive species silence is the true weapon, for it wounds them to the quick of their defect. They hunger and thirst for contradiction, from the combative instinct which inheres in their blood and impels the race to every form of conquest and proselytism. I therefore bore with the magnanimity of a sage the sharp glance of Miss Clara's blue eyes, which challenged to mortal combat the whole Gallic nation, the more easily perhaps, because Miss Mary interposed, remarking: —

"The truth is they discovered at Monte-Chiaro about two years ago some very beautiful frescos of your beloved Benozzo, as fresh and brilliant in color as those in the Capello Riccardi at Florence. He was known to have worked in the convent, and he was also known to have painted, among other things, the legend of Saint Thomas. That calumniator Vasari says so. But no trace of this work, which the master must have executed about the time of his Pisan frescos, remained. Now see how things happen. Dom Griffi, the old Benedictine abbé who has had charge of the convent ever since it was 'nationalized,' ordered a servant to sweep down a spider's web in a corner of one of the cells now used as lodging-rooms for travellers. A bit of plaster was knocked off by the broom. The abbé sent for a ladder and clambered up, in spite of his three-score years and ten. I ought to tell you that the convent is his idol, his passion. He has seen it peopled by two hundred of his brethren, and he accepted the post of warden after the decree in the full belief that he will one day see it restored to what it has been. His sole thought is of the time when the monks will return and find the ancient structure preserved from degradation. That is why he consented to the trying service of giving board and lodging to tourists. He was afraid of an inn at his gates, like that at Monte-Cassin;

he could n't endure the idea of such an inn close beside the convent, with American girls dancing every evening to a piano — "

"But he mounted the ladder, and what then?" I said, to cut short the panegyric on Dom Griffi. I was fearful of a reactionary end in some bigoted Protestant attack; and in fact, Miss Clara did not lose the opportunity.

"I must say," she remarked, profiting by the interruption. "I should never have believed, unless I had known Dom Griffi, that a man could possibly be so intelligent or so useful in a priest's garb."

"When he mounted the ladder," said Miss Mary, "he scratched off more of the plaster very carefully. First he found a forehead and eyes, then a mouth, then the whole face of a Christ. All these Italians are born artists; it runs in their veins. The abbé saw at once that he had a fresco of great value under a layer of plaster."

"Those monks," interrupted Miss Clara, "found nothing better to do than to whitewash the masterpieces of the 15th century and hide the decorations of the old masters behind their stucco ornamentations and their frescos of a depraved style."

"Nevertheless, it was the monks who ordered those very decorations," I said; "which goes to prove that good or bad taste has nothing to do with religious convictions."

"Well, naturally," replied the terrible Englishwoman, "being a Parisian you are sceptical."

"Let me finish my story," cried Miss Mary, by which I perceived that she was something more than pre-Raphaelite, she was kind; which in these days of vagrant æstheticism is rare. She was visibly distressed by the militant inclinations of her travelling companion as directed towards me. "Dear Miss Roberts, you shall discuss that subject later," she said. "The good abbé pondered how he could clear the wall of the whitewash without endangering the fresco, and this is how he managed it. He glued a cloth to the plaster and let it dry till it held firmly; then he wrenched cloth and plaster away and scratched off what remained inch by inch. It took him months, poor old man, to uncover, first, one panel on which Saint Thomas is represented laying his finger on the Saviour's wounds, and then another, where the apostle is seen at an audience granted to him by the King of the Indies, Gondoforus —"

"But you, of course, don't know that legend," said Miss Clara, brusquely addressing me. This time I would not give her satisfaction by again exhibiting French superficialty. I had read the legend — by chance, be it said — in Voragine when I was hunting, I must admit, for the subject of a tale wanted by a boulevard newspaper. I recollected it on account of the

noble symbolism it contains, and also for its exotic character which gives it all the charm of the picturesque. Saint Thomas being at Cesarea, our Lord appeared to him and ordered him to go to Gondoforus, because that king was seeking for an architect to build him a nobler dwelling than the palace of the Roman emperor. Thomas obeyed. Gondoforus, then on the point of starting for a distant seat of war, gave him enormous quantities of gold and silver intended for the construction of the palace. On his return he ordered the Saint to show him the work. Thomas had distributed the treasure entrusted to him to the poor, even to the last penny, and not one stone of the promised palace had been laid. The king, furiously angry, imprisoned his strange architect and proceeded to meditate as to what were the most refined tortures with which he could punish the traitor. But that very night, behold, the spectre of his brother, who had been dead four days, stood at the foot of his bed and said to him: "The man thou desirest to torture is the servant of God. The angels have shown me a wondrous dwelling of gold and silver and precious stones which he has built for thee in Paradise." Overcome by the apparition and by the words which he heard, Gondoforus hastened to fling himself at the prisoner's feet. Thomas raised him and said: "Dost thou not know, O King, that the

only mansions which endure are those which our faith and our charity build for us in heaven."

"It is quite certain," I said, after referring (not without a certain malicious complacency) to the foregoing legend, "that it must have been a very interesting subject to a painter passionately devoted, like Benozzo, to sumptuous robes, complicated architecture, landscapes with illimitable flora and chimerical beasts —"

"Ah!" cried Miss Dobson, pushing aside in her enthusiasm the dish of purple and green figs which the waiter was offering to her, — a waiter, by the bye, with cheeks that were stiff with a six days' growth of beard, and a threadbare black coat opening to view amazing pink coral buttons stuck into a ragged shirt-front, — "you can't imagine the magnificence of the Gondoforus in the fresco at Monte-Chiaro, — a sort of Moor, with a green silk robe embroidered in relief with gold, yellow boots with spurs, also gold — such liquid coloring! so perfectly preserved, so fresh! Just think! these layers of whitewash must have been put on the wall about the end of the 16th century; consequently, there 's not a blemish in the painting, no retouching; there it still is in the cell where it was painted; which used to be, I am told, the oratory of the bishops who visited the convent. It covers the whole of one large wall and the space above a window."

The conversation had reached this point and I was just asking Miss Mary for a few points as to the ways of communication between Pisa and the convent (for I was drawn there past all power of resistance by this revelation of an unknown work by my favorite master) when the door opened to admit a couple, already known, no doubt, to the English spinsters, for Miss Mary cast down her eyes with a blush, while Miss Clara remarked to her in English: —

"Why, it is that Frenchman and the woman we met in Florence at the *trattoria*. How extraordinary that a respectable hotel like this should receive such persons."

I looked myself, and saw a couple taking their seats at one of the small tables which surrounded the large one, whose questionable character was too evident to allow me to accuse my formidable neighbor of slandering them. It was equally impossible to deny the nationality of the young man. He might have been twenty-five years of age, but his drawn features and pallid skin, his shrunken shoulders and the nervous condition visible in his whole being gave him a look of premature age, counteracted however by a pair of black eyes which were very keen and extremely handsome. He was dressed with a semi-elegance which had a flavor of pretension on the one hand, and a touch of bohemianism on the other. You ask me how?

I can no more put these shades into words than I can fully explain the general characteristics which made this stranger the type, exclusively and incontestably, the type of a Frenchman. It is a cut of the coat, it is a gesture, it is a way of sitting down to table and taking up the card to order dinner, which tells us instantly that we have a compatriot within two feet of us. I shall have the courage to admit, although I may wound what a humorist sarcastically calls antechamber patriotism, that such a meeting is more alarming than agreeable. Travelling Frenchmen certainly bring their worst qualities to the front, — like travelling English and travelling Germans for that matter, with this difference, that while I am indifferent to those of the English, and those of the Germans simply entertain me, I suffer from the vulgar qualities of Frenchmen because I know how they slander our dear, good land. I have never, in an Italian café, heard a Frenchman on his travels talking loudly and flouting the town where he chanced to be and the one from which he came in maliciously depreciating speeches, without reflecting that there were twenty ears about him to absorb his jests, or rather the mere wording of them. For though five foreigners out of ten may understand our language, how many know its spirit — I mean the harmless spirit of its wit? One in a hundred possibly. What absurd national

misunderstandings are begun and envenomed by these thoughtless remarks made in public with as little evil intention as that with which some of us scribble articles in a newspaper office merely to eke out "copy."

The present stranger belonged, fortunately for my nerves, to the species which, thanks be to God! does exist, of silent Frenchmen. Moreover, his companion of the evening absorbed his attention in a manner which certainly seemed to justify Miss Roberts' attack. This mysterious friend was about thirty-five years of age, and if he, under every aspect, was a Frenchman of the bourgeois class, she was as unmistakably an Italian, from her little head to her little feet, from her rather too marked features to the flouncings of her gown, from the end of her arm laden with bracelets to the tip of her shoe with its exaggerated heel. Her black eyes betrayed when they rested on the young man a passion which was certainly not feigned. Neither of them appeared to be aware that they were under observation, and in spite of a vague expression of slyness and distrust which something, I hardly know what, gave to the man, this air of mutual sentiment and absorption made me suddenly sympathetic with them, — so much so that I undertook their defence against Miss Roberts when she continued: —

"Besides, she is twenty years older than he!"

"Say ten," I interrupted, laughing; "and she is very pretty."

"With us, a gentleman never parades himself in that way with a creature who is not a lady."

I was thankful that she made this speech in English, which my compatriot was not likely to understand, all the more because she uttered it in a high, clear voice. I could not help replying in the same language, partly, I acknowledge, from the vanity of proving to her that I could speak it.

"But how do you know she is not a lady?"

"How do I know?" Ah! my poor little vanity. I was punished for it on the spot, for she corrected my pronunciation sarcastically by repeating my own words. "Why, look at the way she eats."

I must confess that these two specimens of the Latin race presented at that moment a spectacle which did not conform to any of the precepts taught by governesses on the farther shores of the British Channel. While waiting for the soup, the gentleman had begun upon the flask of Chianti and the bread beside his plate; he was dipping his bread in wine; while she, on her part, was nibbling a bit of citron, taken from the dishes of the dessert. The contrast between the daughters of Albion (as they were called in the novels of 1830) and these children of nature was a little overpowering. I was

afraid I should laugh, and so, as dinner was now over, I left the table at the same time as the Germans, the Milanese, the relatives of the officer, and the officer himself. I thought my neighbors would soon follow us, as in fact they did, leaving the two lovers to their tête-à-tête, under the indulgent protection of the coral-buttoned waiter. Perhaps there was some virtue in my rather precipitate retreat, for I surmised a slight romance in the rather unintelligible conjunction of the young Frenchman and the beautiful Italian. But I would die sooner than remorselessly play the part of spy which modern writers are pleased to call documentary research, and of which they boast as a professional merit.

The following morning I had almost forgotten this more or less morganatic pair, and was thinking only of the frescos discovered by Dom Griffi, and of the best means of transporting myself to the convent of Monte-Chiaro. I went to the office of the hotel to discuss the little journey with the clerk, an ex-Garibaldian who was so proud of having worn the red blouse of the *Mille* that he still lived in a fog of ultra-revolutionary fancies, — all the while busy, with commendable activity, in providing that hot-water was duly sent to No. 6 and that No. 10 obtained the tea it ordered.

"The government is too indulgent to these

conspirators," he said to me, referring to the poor monks, instead of replying to my questions about the road to take, the vehicle to choose, and the price to pay. My friends the English-women had gone by the diligence as far as it went, and had done the rest of the way on foot. I succeeded, however, in extracting from the Cavaliere Dante Annibale Cornacchini (such was the name of the former companion of the Hero) a promise that a coachman selected by him should await me with a light carriage at the *tocco*. What a charming expression! and how characteristic of the Italian people; there 's a whole sensation in it. It means one blow of a hammer, and also one hour after midday, the hour when the clock-hammer sounds one blow. What was my surprise when on leaving the office of the hotel (where a bronze statuette of the General in his blouse and another of Mazzini in an overcoat surmounted the hostelry placards) I found myself face to face with the young Parisian of the previous evening, who was evidently waiting for me; for he approached at once with a certain grace of manner, or so it seemed to me, — for what author would not have looked with favorable eyes upon the bearing of a stranger who met him with words like these: —

"Monsieur, I have seen your name upon the register, and as I have read all your works I venture" — etc.

It is enough to have been before the public in any capacity whatever to know how little such compliments are worth. But the childish vanity of the literary man is such that he is always taken in by them and does as I then did; for (having vowed to myself that I would not spoil my sensation of that dear and mournful Pisa with frivolous talk and new acquaintances) I found myself ten minutes later walking along the quay with this stranger; in less than half an hour I was wandering, still in his company, beneath the vaults of the Campo Santo; and at the end of another hour I had induced him to accompany me to the convent, and we were both getting into the *carrozzela* with one horse which was to take us to Monte-Chiaro. This sudden travelling intimacy sprang up without the motive on my part of a nearer view of the pretty and natural Italian who had dined with him on the preceding evening. He had taken care, be it understood, to speak of her at once. I thus learned that the possessor of those expressive features, that emotional pallor, and the gestures which were almost vulgar was an actress in a travelling troop then at Florence, and that she had left Pisa that morning to play at night, and that he had been unable to accompany her. He did not tell me why. But I guessed the reason from the rest of his history, which he related in the first half-hour we were together. Even without the

rather romantic attraction of this little incident he would have taken my attention as a sharply defined type of a class of young men whom I already knew, as I thought, sufficiently well. Still one can never see too much of the representatives of a coming generation. How can we help them (for that is the duty of those of us who wield the pen) if we do not talk with them, and talk a good deal, too? But, alas, it was not impressions of this kind that I was seeking along the shores of the sad and glaucous Arno. Was I fated to meet, everywhere and at all times, that which I like least in Paris without being able to check my interest in it, as though I really liked it? Would my insatiable curiosity about the human soul never cease to be stronger than my lofty projects of an ideal existence among the masterpieces of art?

The young man was known by the unaristocratic name of Philippe Dubois. He was the fourth son of a university professor of some standing but little means. After a brilliant course of study at his provincial lyceum he had come to Paris, first with a scholarship as licentiate, next on a fellowship. He passed his two examinations, and the influence of a friend of his father obtained for him a mission to Italy in quest of archæological remains. This employment had come to an end during the present month, and he was now on his way back

to France. I had lived too keenly during my own youth among surroundings analogous to his, not to understand at once the pinched condition to which the family resources had reduced him. Probably he had barely enough money to get home. That was, no doubt, the real reason why the actress had left him without his being able to follow her. In recalling at this moment the various confidences he made to me I once more recognize the truth that external facts are of little account; the true motor is in the soul which receives their impression.

This sudden attraction between a young student in love with the world of antiquity, where all is beauty, and an ardent and disinterested young actress is already assuming the charm of a sentimental idyl, is it not? Remark the elements, — a forced parting, the shedding of many tears, the acceptance of a path to which destiny has called us, — truly a romance of capricious fate, and all its poesy!

I had no difficulty in assuring myself that Philippe Dubois felt none of the sad and touching emotions which belonged to his romance. There was not the slightest shade of tenderness in the words with which he unfolded to me his facile intrigue. They betrayed nothing but the vanity of being loved by a woman who, as I afterwards ascertained, was a good deal before the public. But then, if he had been the ingen-

uous lover that he ought to have been would he have captured my attention as he did when I discovered that his past existence of studious youth was but a phase, an aspect, just as this love affair was, to his mind, a mere accident? That which constituted the actual being of this young fellow was one of the most excessive literary ambitions which I have met during my intercourse with such aspirants, — an ambition that was all the more keen because his pride, joined to a certain sullen timidity, had hitherto prevented him from entering the career. During the four or five years of arid study which followed his college life he had nourished the *literary incubus* on his breast with all the cruel candor that malady compels. There were in him, and very distinctly, two persons: one submissive and duty-bound, the son of a professor sent on a mission; the other poetic, with the soul of a romance-maker without a career, with all the acrimony of that precocious bitterness which accompanies a repressed vocation. Such duality is a proof of strong will or, better still, of a nature superior through adaptiveness and the power of self-control. But the harshness and acrimony revealed at the same time a loveless soul, whose chief aspirations in a literary career were for the coarser satisfactions of fame and money.

"You can understand," he said to me, after relating several scenes in his intercourse with

the poor actress in which he played a sufficiently Juanesque part to take pleasure in recalling them, "you can understand that I have not lost the advantage of such emotions. I have nearly finished a little volume of verses which I will show you later — Ah! I 've had enough of Etruscan tombs and Greek inscriptions and all that pedantic drudgery which I only agreed to do for pay. As soon as I take my last degree I shall resign and launch out into a literary career. I have a series of articles in my head. Some I've already sent to various journals signed with a pen-name. They have not appeared — envy, I know, in the men who read them."

"You should make allowance for the unhappy editors, who have not time to read everything themselves," I said. "They are pledged to take certain things; and besides, they must admit achieved positions and well-known talent."

"Well-known talent! let 's talk of that," he exclaimed with a bitter laugh, which increased my perception of the smothered rage of the unpublished writer, embittered by envy before he had even measured himself with his rivals; and he proceeded to take up one by one all the best-known authors of the present day. This one was a mere relater of anecdotes without thought; that one a hawker of images for workmen; that other a Paul de Kock modernized, the fourth was a social manœuvrer, clever at sugaring

Stendhal and Balzac for the cloyed stomachs of fashionable women. To all of them he fastened the low tales tattled throughout Paris by the score in the childishly cruel little world of literary aspirants. I let him talk with a profound sense of sadness; not that I attach extreme importance to the strictures of the newcomers upon their elders — among whom I now rank. Such attacks have been made from all time, and they have their uses; it was the sarcasm of Mephistopheles which compelled Faust to work. But I perceived beneath these harsh criticisms (with which perhaps he fancied he pleased me by condemning my literary fellows, foolish lad!) a real anguish. Above all, I noticed in him the excessive and preternatural pride which belongs to our period — I mean in the world of thinkers. Formerly all ambitions were alike selfish, though that among literary men was the least perceptibly so. Nowadays when universal levelling has brought the recognized brain-worker into a more brilliant position (at least apparently) literature appears to many as a fair means of rapid fortune. They enter it therefore as others enter commerce — for precisely the same reasons. There is, however, this difference. The ardent toiler in the Bourse and its by-ways knows that he has money behind him; the ardent toiler in literature mistakes his eagerness after success for the afflatus of apostleship; and this produces, if suc-

cess does not come to him by the time he is forty, a condition of soul that is truly terrible, for the most painful passions and the vilest combine to rend him. This was seen only too plainly among certain writers of the Commune. As I listened to the young man's talk I knew him for the goaded rebel of his circumstances. But, even so, the rebel of the period. He held himself in hand, partly from an instinct of bourgeois prudence, and also from a natural taste for the higher culture which ought to have saved him, and might still do so. Had he not had the intelligence and the patience to acquire, in spite of his envious literary fever, a science, the knowledge of a craft? and this thought gave me the idea of a struggle which might have taken place or was now taking place within him.

"You are very severe on your elders," I said, to stop his string of Parisian calumnies. "I know all those tales; they are monotonously abject and false!"

"You 'll see what I shall say when I begin to write!" he cried, with a fatuous self-conceit that was naïve and yet villanous. "Ha! ha! one must treat one's predecessors as the Polynesians do old men. They put them up a tree and shake it. As long as the old fellows have strength to hold on it 's all right. When they fall they are knocked on the head and eaten."

I did not reply to the youthful blood-thirsti-

ness of this paradox. Philippe Dubois was merely "getting a rise" out of me, to use an expressive slang term now a little out of date. I continued the conversation by inquiring as to his researches in archæology; which put him into visible ill-humor. Then I gave him, point-blank, the advice not to enter journalism when he returned to France, but to find a situation in the provinces, where he could live a useful life and eventually come before the public as the writer of some valuable work. That, alas! was the advice which was given to me at his age, but I had not followed it; which goes to prove that this lottery of misery and fame called the profession of men of letters will always tempt a certain class of souls among young men. Must I own it? I felt a sort of irony, almost an hypocrisy in the rôle of moralist which I was playing. It gave me a slight sense of remorse, and then, as I really pitied the groundwork of inward dissatisfaction on which he appeared to me to be living, I ended by proposing that he should go with me to the convent. This excursion led to the brief and rapid drama to which I have alluded, — to explain which these over-long preliminaries were really necessary. Philippe's return would be delayed only two days; he accepted the proposal and we started as the hour "struck" according to the promise of the ex-*Mille*, another of whose delightful say-

ings I cannot refrain from here quoting. He seized the opportunity, while we were waiting for the coachman, to communicate his ideas on the existing French parliament. "They have lost the revolutionary traditions," he said to me; and then, after a terrorist declamation which I will not transcribe, he added, with comical melancholy, "I even think they are capitalists!"

Thanks to this speech, which Philippe enjoyed as much as I did, we started in "high spirits" as Miss Mary Dobson would have said, I much disposed, as indeed he was, to enjoy the trip. The road which leads from Pisa to Monte-Chiaro runs at first through a charming landscape of vineyards interspersed with mulberry trees. Gigantic reeds quiver to the breeze, villas surrounded by cedars bear marble lions on their entrance gates, and always, for a background, lie the gorges of that mountain which, as Dante says, prevents the Pisans from seeing Lucca: —

> "Cacciando 'l lupo e i lupicini al monte,
> Per che i Pisan veder Lucca non ponno."

"That is what is lacking to us in France," I remarked to my companion after quoting the lines. "We have no poet who has given a legendary fame to the remotest corners of his native land."

"Do you care for that?" he answered. "Now, for my part, Joanne's guide-book for this region

puts me quite out of conceit of the Divine Comedy."

Receiving this reply and noticing that his late gayety was already over, I regretted having brought him. I foresaw that if he began by fencing with paradox he would keep to the foils; and a young man of his type once thrown into an attitude of self-conceit, stiffens himself in it more and more, though it be to his own injury. I dropped into silence therefore, and tried to lose myself in the contemplation of nature, which was now growing wilder. Our carriage, though light, was moving slowly. We were entering a region which was almost without vegetation. Bare foot-hills rose on all sides; huge swellings, as it were, of grayish clay fissured by rain. No more brooks, no more vineyards, no olive-trees, no villas, but a positive resemblance to a desert. The coachman was off his box. He was a little man, with a square and delicately cut face, who called his gray mare Zara and softened, like other Tuscans, the hard *c* at the beginning of words into the aspirated *h*. "Huesta havalla," he said, speaking of his beast, instead of "questa cavalla," — this mare.

"I bought her at Livorno, monsieur," he said to me. "I paid only two hundred francs for her because they thought she was lame. Look and see if she is! — Hey! Zara, courage! She follows me about, monsieur, just like a dog, and

I love her, ah, yes, I love her! My wife is jealous, but I tell her, 'Zara earns my bread, and you — you eat it.' There, monsieur, look at those rocks; that's where Lorenzo di Medici came near being murdered after the massacre of the Pazzi."

"Is n't it a curious thing," I remarked to my companion, "that this man, who is only cab-driver, should talk to us in the same breath of his mare Zara and Lorenzo di Medici? Ah, these Italians! How they know the history of their beloved land, and how proud they are of it!"

"Oh, as for that," said Philippe, shrugging his shoulders, "Alfieri has a line which suits them 'The human plant is born maturer here than elsewhere.' The fact is that they are taught from their earliest years to speculate on foreigners; they are trained to the quest of fees. They are scarcely weaned before they turn into guides. Ha! I 'll write a novel on modern Italy and its colossal humbugs! I 've collected notes. I 'll show up this nation — "

Whereupon he launched forth into a violent diatribe against that sweet country where the *si* resounds, while I continued, for my part, to see her as she first appeared to me in 1874, the home, the sole home of Beauty. Philippe's outburst reminded me of talks I had heard in my early years, when I frequented the symposia

of future poets and romance-writers. Nearly all these embryo writers were employed in the public offices. Bitterly hating that abject life, they spent hours in filling their souls with gall, pouring out their contempt for men and things with a species of acrid eloquence which often made me, in those days, doubt everything and myself as well. I was ignorant then of what I have since had too good reason to know by experience, that such eloquence is merely a form of impotent envy which knows itself for what it is. All great talent begins and ends in love and in enthusiasm. The precocious cynics are the unfortunates who foresee their future sterility and are taking a premature revenge. Heavens! how I wished the fellow would talk to me (with exaggerated, even ridiculous ardor if he chose) about Florence where he had worked, where he had been loved, — yes, above all, about his love. But he really seemed to have forgotten it as he plunged, apropos of the book he intended to write on Italy, into inquiries as to the salaries or the profits of our principal authors."

"Is it true that Jacques Molan gets a franc and a half a volume? They tell me Vincy is paid two francs a line — ah, the wretch!"

I now discerned behind all this bitter criticism and the hardening effect of disillusion an almost frantic desire for money, and by an inconsistency which was really explainable, I for-

gave him for that sentiment far more than for his irony. The iron hand of necessity presses so cruelly upon a brain in which all youthful energies are seething, and which sees in a trifle of gold the emancipation of its inner self.

"And to think," he concluded with infinite bitterness, "that my father will not give me even the first three thousand francs that I must have to live in Paris before I make my first appearance as an author! Yes, that sum would be enough to keep me while I learned my ground and waged my first battle. Three thousand francs! just what a commonplace fellow like [here the name of a writer much in vogue] gets for fifty pages of copy!"

I have omitted to say that in the meantime he had sketched his father and mother for my benefit in rather flattering likenesses. How can I explain that in spite of all this he still continued to interest me? He was giving vent to the ideas I most dislike; he divulged sentiments which seemed to me radically opposed to those a young writer ought to feel. But with it all I felt that he suffered; and I waited for the reaction, when, having produced his first effect, he might listen to my sage counsels and possibly let me rectify two or three of his absurd points of view. On this I counted all the more because his manner of expressing himself, and his references, revealed a genuine culture and a mind that

was more than keen — that was strong and original.

The scenery grew more and more savage. We had left behind us, in the far distance, the great plain on which Pisa lies. The dome and the leaning tower reappeared every now and then between two peaks, as if raised in relief upon a map. Livorno was outlined far below, with the sea in all its blueness; while about us yawned those great holes hollowed in the friable earth which they call in those parts *balze*. Summits and peaks bare and menacing overhung us. The cattle, now few in number, were no longer the beautiful white beasts of the Maremma, with their long, straight horns. The horns of these were short and curved upwards, their hides were as gray as the soil. For the first time since we started Philippe Dubois said a few words which betrayed a consciousness of present sensation.

"Is n't the whole landscape like a series of pit-holes? — just the place for a convent."

At that instant the coachman, now on his box, turned to me and called out: —

"Monsieur, there 's Monte-Chiaro."

With the end of his whip he pointed to a valley on a slope of the mountain more gullied than the rest, in the centre of which, on a little hill planted with cypress-trees, stood a long structure built of red brick. On that cloudless blue day the color of the walls contrasted so

vividly with the blackness of the surrounding foliage that the reason for the name, Monte-Chiaro, was obvious. Except on the Monte-Oliveto, near Sienna, I have never seen a sanctuary for retreat so relentlessly far removed from all approach of human life. I knew, from information obtained of the Garibaldian at Pisa, which eked out that of the Englishwomen, that the abbé had consented to the humble task of housing and feeding the visitors who came to see the convent, which was secularized in 1867.

"What sort of cooking do you think we shall find in this Thebaïd?" I said to my companion, to whom I had previously explained the manner in which we were to pass the night and the following day.

"As there's a tariff charge of five francs a day," he replied, "the priest would n't belong to this country if he did n't put three in his own pocket."

"Well, at any rate, a fine Benozzo Gozzoli is well worth a bad dinner," I replied, laughing.

Half an hour after we had thus come in sight, from a rise in the road, of the time-worn refuge of the Benedictines, once so celebrated throughout Tuscany, now so sadly solitary, the white mare Zara was beginning to climb the hilly approach, which was planted with cypress-trees. My companion and I left the carriage and walked

up for a better view of the little shrines raised along the side of the road at a distance of some fifty feet apart, and were under the spell, he as well as I, of the melancholy majesty of this approach to the cloister. I beheld in thought the innumerable white cowls which had filed through these sombre avenues, the Benedictines of Monte-Chiaro having been, like those of Oliveto, dedicated to the Virgin. My English friend had initiated me into this little matter of costume. I thought of the simple souls to whom this barren horizon had marked the end of the world, of the weary souls who had found rest in this lonely spot, of the violent souls gnawed here as elsewhere by envy, by ambition, by all those cravings of pride which the apostle justly classes among the lusts of the flesh. My absorption in this vision was so complete that I woke with a start when the coachman, who was walking up this last ascent, leading Zara by the bridle and talking to her to encourage her, suddenly turned and called back to me: —

"Monsieur, here 's the Father abbé coming to meet us. He must have heard the wheels."

"Why, that 's the late Hyacinth, of the Palais Royal!" cried Philippe. It is true that, seen as he was on the threshold of the convent, at the farther end of the sombre path, the poor monk did present a beggarly appearance. He wore a ragged cassock, the color of which, originally

black, was now greenish. He told me later that the government had placed him in charge of the confiscated convent on condition that he renounced the beautiful white robe of his order. His tall, thin body, slightly bowed by age, rested on a stick. The brim of his hat was thread-worn. His face, turned towards the new-comers, and perfectly smooth, did vaguely resemble that of a comic actor, while an endless nose developed therefrom, — the nose of a snuff-taker, — seeming longer still from the leanness of the cheeks and the sunken mouth, which had lost its front teeth. But the old man's glance soon corrected this first impression. Though his eyes were not large, and their color, of a muddy green, was indistinct, a flame burned within them which would soon have quenched the jesting spirit of my young companion if he had had the slightest experience in judging of the human countenance. His impertinent remark shocked me all the more because he made it in a high tone of voice, which sounded through the deep silence of the autumn afternoon. But did Dom Gabriele Griffi understand French? and if he did, would the name of the poor comedian who played the part of Marasquin so comically in the *Mari de la débutante*, mean anything to his mind? The foolish jest served to flash the scenes of that amusing play before my mind. What a contrast! The four little girls who cry so gayly under the de-

spairing nose of the said Hyacinth, all foul pointing their pretty toes in the air at the same moment, "*Sa femme l'a quitté — pour aller faire la noce — et allez donc*," were pirouetting before me when the hermit, whose guests we were now to be, said to us in the purest and most elegant Italian, —

"You have come, gentlemen, to visit the convent? Why did you not send me word? Pasquale," he added, addressing the coachman, "you should have told these gentlemen to send me a written notice."

"I thought, of course, the gentlemen had done so, Father abbé, when the clerk at their hotel confided them to my care."

"Well, they must eat what there is," said the abbé; then turning to us with a kindly smile, and a gesture towards heaven, he added, "When things go wrong we must shut our eyes and commend ourselves *up there*."

I stammered, in moderately correct Italian, an excuse, which the father cut short with a wave of his hand.

"Come and look at your rooms in the first place. To console you for the food you will be obliged to eat I will make you priors of the order."

He laughed at his little joke, the meaning of which I did not at the moment seize. I was completely absorbed in the strange sight of the vast red edifice in the glow of the setting sun;

measuring its great size and comprehending its solitude in the same glance. Monte-Chiaro was built at various periods, from the day in 1259 when the head of the family of the Gherardesca, uncle of Ugolino the tragic, retired to this remote valley with nine companions, seeking to do penance. In the last century over three hundred monks lived here at their ease; and the abbey and its belongings, its bakery, fish-pond, wine-press, and cow-sheds, sufficed for their maintenance. But the innumerable windows of this great farmhouse were now closed, the faded color of the shutters, once green, told of its abandonment, as did the grass on the terrace before the church and the veil of dusty cobwebs on the walls of the corridors through which we passed as we followed Dom Griffi.

Even the minor details of the ornamentation showed the former prosperity of the abbey, from the vast lavabo of marble, with lion's heads, placed at the entrance of the refectory, to the architecture of the three cloisters, one succeeding another, and all three decorated with frescos. A mere glance showed me that these paintings were in the pedantic Italian taste of the seventeenth century; possibly, therefore, their academic coloring concealed some spontaneous masterpiece of a Gozzoli or an Orcagna. We mounted the steps of a staircase hung with pictures blackened by time, among them a charming

cavalier of Timoteo della Vite, the real master of Raffaelle, stranded here by chance. Then we entered another corridor on the next floor, with numerous cell doors marked *Visitator primus, Visitator secundus,* and so on, until we stopped before the last, which was surmounted by a mitre and crozier. The abbé, who had not said a word since we left the entrance, except to point out the Timoteo, now spoke in French, with a slightly Italian turn of phrase, but very little accent, —

"These are the quarters which I give to guests;" then making way for us to enter, he added: "The superiors of the convent occupied these rooms for five hundred years."

I glanced at Master Philippe from the corner of my eye, and perceived that he was somewhat shamefaced at the discovery that our guide was thoroughly conversant with the French language. He had chosen as we came along the corridors to make other remarks and jokes in very doubtful taste. Had the abbé noticed them, and did he mean to give us warning that he understood what we said? or was he merely seeking in his simple hospitality to relieve us of the effort of speaking in a foreign language? I could not guess his meaning from the immovable features of his large face. He seemed wholly absorbed in the numerous memories which the vast room where we now stood evoked for him. It was

poorly furnished with a few wooden chairs, a square table, and a sofa. In one corner a half-open door gave to view an altar covered with a smoke-stained cloth; it was there, no doubt, that the priors said their prayers. Another door, opposite and wide open, showed two more connecting rooms, each with an iron bed, wooden chairs, and wash-basins standing on rickety bureaus. The red-tiled floors were not even polished; the woodwork of the doors and the window frames was cracked and defaced, but the landscape seen from the latter was really glorious. On a height directly opposite was a village with houses close together, and from this village to the monastery a marvellous vegetation clothed the slope, — no longer the gloomy cypresses of the other side, but oaks, whose green foliage was turning crimson; while farther down, in the valley which lay to the southward, were other signs of cultivation, and olive-trees interspersed among the oaks. Evidently the monks stranded in this Thebaïd had toiled there. Beyond this oasis solitude and desolation reappeared, sterner than before, darkly frowned upon by the highest peak of the Pisan mountains, that of Verruca, where a ruined castle is still crumbling, once the stronghold of some lord of the soil, against whose attacks the square bastion which defends the convent on this side was doubtless built. This little square redoubt

was outlined, with its crenelated bastion in red stone, before the window at which we stood, and against the blue of a sky now flecked with rosy vapor. My companion was no longer disposed to jest, being struck, as I was, to the depths of his artistic nature, by the graceful severity of that horizon on which had rested the eyes, long closed, of many monks, some thinking only of another world, others beholding in the rosy sky so softly roseate the mirage of an earthly paradise, others again, ambitious and lordly, dreaming amid this silence of a cardinal's hat, or it may be, of the tiara, and then — "the silence vast and fathomless of death."

That line in the "Contemplations" came to my memory, as it ever does in all encounters with the past, when I feel the shock of a sensation, which is almost agony, produced by too close a contact with that which once was but never shall be again. It lasted barely a minute, but during that minute the ancient life of the old monastery lay spread before my eyes, incarnate in the humble or the ambitious dreams of those who had stood where I was standing, the princes of that cloister, whose sole representative was an old abbé with ragged cassock and rusty shoes, who, breaking the silence, said to us: —

"The view is fine, is it not? I have lived forty years in this convent without ever leaving it, but I never weary of that view."

"Forty years!" I exclaimed, almost against my will. "Without ever leaving the convent! Surely you have made a few journeys?"

"True, so I have, — two in all," he answered, "each of six days. I went to Milan, my own city, when my sister was dying and wished me to bring her the last sacraments. Poor, sainted angel! And I went to Rome when my old master Cardinal Peloro received the hat — Yes," he continued, looking fixedly into space, "I came here in 1845. How beautiful Monte-Chiaro was then! What masses were sung! To have seen this convent as I once saw it, and to see it as I now see it is to look upon a body without a soul where all was youth and life — But patience, patience! 'Multa renascentur quæ jam cecidere, cadentque quæ nunc sunt in honore.' Now, gentlemen, I must leave you to order your dinner. Luigi will bring up your valises. With him, remember, patience, patience. You must shut your eyes and commend yourselves to God!"

With this advice and quotation Dom Griffi left us, and he had scarcely crossed the threshold of the door before Philippe threw himself into a chair with that eternal, sneering laugh of his.

"Upon my word," he cried, "that grotesque old fellow was alone worth the journey."

"I don't know what you find grotesque in what the priest has said or done," I replied.

"He told us in the simplest way of the changes in the convent, which must be a great grief to him, and which he bears with the hope of a true believer. I am nearly fifteen years older than you, I have been about the world as you are going now, in pursuit of many a chimera, and I have, alas, learned to know that there is nothing wiser, nothing nobler here below than a man who works at one work, with the same ideal, in the same corner of this earth."

"Amen!" added my young companion, laughing louder still. "I agree to it all! the chanted masses, his master the cardinal, the sainted soul of his sister, and jostling among them that quotation from Horace, and his functions as an innkeeper! By the bye, we shall pay him well for his hospitality. This miserable hole," dragging me by the arm into the first bedroom, "is worth, I should say, about a franc a night. But," he added with sarcastic consideration, "since my remarks displease you, my dear master —"

Queer fellow! I cannot better describe the sensation he produced in me than to say it was that of a blind which creaks in the wind. At each new impression his nerves gave forth a rasping note. But the most disconcerting and puzzling thing of all, on which I think I have scarcely dwelt enough, was the flame of intellect running through these whimsical outbreaks of a petulant and ill-bred child. I omitted to say

how, during the journey, he had amazed me by two or three remarks on the geological construction of the country through which we were passing; and now, going out upon a balcony which served for both rooms and looked toward the redoubt which protected the abbey, he began to talk of Florentine architecture like one who had studied it well in books, and also with his eyes, — two forms of study seldom combined. This knowledge, quite other than that his mission had prepared me to expect, showed, in addition to his surprising acquaintance, which I had also detected, with contemporary literature both high and low, an amazing suppleness of intellect. But this intellect seemed to hang to him like a jewel, perhaps I had better say an instrument. It was something worn outside of him. It was not he himself. He possessed it, but it did not possess him; it helped him neither to believe nor to love. I compared him, involuntarily, to the very man, Dom Griffi, at whom he had been scoffing. Certainly the poor monk could never shine through intellectual subtlety, but he conveyed an instant impression of sincere and single-minded devotion to his mission, to his watch over the beloved convent until the longed-for return of his brethren. Comparing the two, which, I asked myself, was the young man, which the old man, if youth consists in grasping an ideal with the force of an invincible will?

However, such as he was, made up of irony and precocious nihilism, my young companion was consistent with himself. He was a complete antithesis to the poor priest self-devoted to the care of an empty monastery, but the antithesis was frank and genuine, the opposition of the present half of our century to the simple and pious spirit of former times. But, I asked myself again, was I not equally unfortunate, even more so, — I, whose life was being spent in the effort to comprehend fully both the criminal charm of negation and the splendors of devout faith without ever remaining at one or the other of these two poles of the human spirit?

These reflections were more importunate still when I found myself seated about seven o'clock before the meal which the abbé had ordered for us in the large hall, formerly, as he told us, the refectory of the convent. A brass lamp of the old shape, with three wicks and the accessories of snuffer, pricker, and extinguisher dangling by little chains of the same metal, gave a smoky light to one corner of an enormous table, on which were glass decanters bearing the arms of the convent. Each of us had two beside him; one filled with wine, the other with water. These were the bottles which formerly doled out to the monks the parsimonious amount of liquid allowed to their thirst. A dish of fresh figs and another of grapes were there for our dessert.

The soup was already served in plates awaiting us, while goat's cheese, raw ham, stale bread, and boiled chestnuts, in other plates, made up the bill of fare, the frugality of which incited the old monk to another Latin quotation of the same order as its predecessor. He had said the Benedicite as he sat down with us. "Castaneæ molles et pressi copia lactis," he added, pointing to the dishes which illustrated Virgil's lines.

"I expected that," muttered Philippe in my ear. Then he began, in his most serious manner, to discourse to Dom Griffi of the food of the ancients. I feared, and not without reason, that this apparent amiability was leading up to some jest.

"When you have no guests do you dine alone, Father?" he inquired.

"No," said the abbé; "there are two of the brotherhood still in the convent. They left us seven. Four died of grief immediately after the suppression. We were all ill and we nursed each other as best we could. God was not willing we should all disappear."

"But when you and the two friars are no longer here, what then?" persisted Philippe.

"Con gallo e senza gallo, Dio fa giorno," said the priest, a slight cloud crossing his face, which, however, was instantly dispersed; the question touched him cruelly in the most sensitive spot of his whole being. "With or without the cock

God sends the day," he added translating the Italian words.

"But how do you occupy your time, Father?" I said to him, full of eager curiosity in presence of a faith so deep that I could almost fancy myself before a man of the Middle Ages.

"Ah! I have no leisure at all," exclaimed Dom Griffi. "Such as you see me now, I have the convent to look after and all the adjacent land to farm. I employ fifteen peasant families. From early morning it is one long procession to my cell; they never leave me a minute to myself, — accounts to settle, confessions to receive, medicine wanted! I 'm a bit of a doctor, of a chemist, a judge, and even a schoolmaster. Yes, I teach the children. Luigi is one of my scholars; he does n't do me credit, but he 's a very good fellow. Moreover, I am a guide, and there are strangers to show about the convent — well, not many."

"I met two English ladies at Pisa, — Miss Dobson and Miss Roberts, — who had just come from Monte-Chiaro," I remarked.

"Ha, ha!" he exclaimed, laughing, — "my two red mullets. I call them so from the color of their hair. They are Protestants, but good souls all the same. *Lascia fare a Dio, ch'è santo vecchio*, — 'Let God manage things, he 's the oldest of the saints.' They are going to Rome. I said to them, 'Saint Peter is a fisherman; I

hope he may catch my red mullets in his net.' England is getting nearer to God every day," he added, rubbing his hands, "ever since Puseyism. Perhaps you young men will see the great sight of all Christians under one father. After that Antichrist, then the Last Judgment, and then — Peace!"

His eyes shone with a visionary light as he said the words. No believer in the Millennium was ever more fervent. Philippe and I looked at each other. I saw the satire in my companion's eyes, and I heard him, with amazement, make answer: —

"In France also catholicism is making great progress, Father. We have had many edifying examples of holiness, — more especially in an author named Baudelaire, and several of his disciples. They are so humble that they call themselves decadents. They write hymns and chant them to each other. They publish newspapers which preach the word. What can be more edifying than such a faith in early youth?"

"I had not heard of them," said the father. "Decadents, did you say?"

"Yes," replied Philippe, "those who descend, who seek those below —"

"I understand," said the father; "they are repentant, and they do right. We have a proverb: *Non bisogna aver paura che de' suoi peccavi*, — 'No need to fear any but our own sins.'"

"Dear Father," I said, to cut short my companion's foolish joke, our frugal supper being now ended, "can we not see to-night those frescos of Gozzoli the English ladies told me of?"

"You cannot judge them very well by this light," said Dom Griffi. Then, carried away by the pleasure of exhibiting his discovery, he added, "But you can see them again to-morrow. Ah! when the monks come back how delighted they will be with those paintings! I hope to find time to clean them thoroughly this winter. Luigi, go and get the taper stick in the chapel; here, take the key," and he drew from his pocket a bunch of enormous keys. "We have to lock every door," he said, "for the peasants are coming and going at all hours. They are worthy souls, but you ought never to tempt the poor."

Luigi soon returned, bearing a sort of rush-light tied to the end of a stick, evidently used to light the altar candles. The monk rose from table, repeated once more the Benedicte, and then with the gayety of a child, he took the brass lamp by the ring at the top and said, laughing: "I march before you, and as we shall pass through an actual labyrinth you can say with Dante, 'Per la impacciata via, retro al mio duca.'"

"More Dante!" whispered Philippe. "These fellows can't do a thing, they can't even eat a bit

of green cheese, their infernal gorgonzola, without being reminded of a line by that fool of a Florentine whose real name was Durante, that is, Durand. Did you know that? Vallès invented the joke. The Divine Comedy signed Durand! I 've a great mind to get it off on our host."

"You are out of your reckoning," I replied. "I have told you already how I admire that great poet."

"I know, I know," he exclaimed; "but that 's on your devout, reverent, and sacrificial side. As for me, as you must see, I belong solely to the generation of the iconoclasts — that 's all the difference between us."

While we exchanged these remarks in a low voice the cassock of our guide, fantastically illumined by the lamp, whose unprotected flames flickered in the draughts, plunged deeper and deeper into interminable corridors. We went up one staircase and down others. Sometimes we threaded the arcades of a cloister. Now and then a night-bird rose at our approach, or a cat fled away silent and terrified. If there had been but a single gleam of moonlight the romantic mystery of our walk across that vast convent might have furnished forth a nightmare. As it was, I evoked in thought the monks of other ages who had glided through these shadows on their way to prayer. Our guide himself seemed set

back forty years, and to be walking the corridors in a file of his brethren, — young, eager in his beliefs, ardent for his order. What memories must stir within him now that he lived alone in that deserted building! And yet he was gay, almost jovial in the midst of this disaster, through the vigor of his faith. What power lies in that mysterious phenomenon which constitutes belief, — absolute, complete, invincible belief? Dom Griffi paused before a door. He searched through the jailer's bunch which he held in his left hand for another key. The old door creaked on its hinges, and we entered a lofty room where the trembling light of the lamp wicks vaguely lighted two walls painted in fresco, and a third which at first sight I took to be all white-washed.

"My son," said the abbé to Luigi, "give me the rushlight; I will light it. You will let the grease fall on my cassock, — which I am sure doesn't need it."

He set the lamp on the floor and looked carefully to the fastening of the taper at the end of the pole. Then, having lighted the little wick, he began to move the flame here and there along the wall; and as if by magic divers portions of the master's work became alive in its brightness. As the old monk moved the tiny flame from spot to spot along the first wall we saw the bleeding wound of Christ, the hand of the apostle

wounding again that bloody wound, the mournful look of the Saviour, the blending of remorse and curiosity on the features of Saint Thomas, and the angels bearing to heaven the instruments of the Passion, their ethereal faces wet with tears. On the other wall we saw, detail by detail, as the flame showed them, the green tunic and the gold embroideries of Gondoforus, the precious stones of the vases given to the apostle, while peacocks displayed their occulated tails upon the balconies, parrots of every color swung from the trees, and great lords started for the chase, dragging leopards by chains through mountain fastnesses. And still the little flame of our guide's torch wandered hither and thither like a will o' the wisp. As it passed along, each spot drawn for an instant from shadowy vagueness retreated into the void. It was of course impossible to judge of the work as a whole, but seen thus it had a charm of fantastic strangeness appropriate to the time and place, — all the greater because Dom Griffi, in exhibiting the two frescos, abandoned himself like a child to the passionate delight they afforded him. He loved to look at them, as a miser loves to handle the gold he hoards. Were they not his own creation — his; the precious jewel with which he had enriched his cherished convent? As he talked of them the wrinkles of his expressive old face emphasized his words: —

"See the finger of the apostle — how he hesitates! and our Lord's gesture, and his lips; that is just as men do when they are wounded and the doctor touches them. Look at that landscape in the background; don't you recognize Verruca and the hill of Monte-Chiaro? See, to the right, there, are the windows of your room. Those dear angels, their eyes are getting smaller! They weep, but they don't want to, and so they wrinkle up their noses like that. And there's the black king; look at his earrings. One of our fathers — who died here after the suppression, God rest his soul! — made a few excavations round one of our convents near Volterra, and he found an Etruscan tomb, and in it were earrings just like these, lying close to the head of a skeleton. I have them now, and I'll show them you. Now, here —"

So saying he turned and I saw him direct his taper towards the wall to the right which I had hitherto supposed to be all whitewashed. The magic flame now illumined a spot in that whiteness about the size of half my hand. Chance had willed that in beginning at random to clear off the plaster the old monk had uncovered just half the face of a Madonna, — the line of her chin, her mouth, nose, and eyes. The smile and the glance of the Blessed Virgin thus appearing in the midst of that great white field grasped the mind like something

supernatural. The little flame flickered a trifle, attached as it was to a long pole in the hands of an old man, and the lips of the Madonna seemed to move, her cheeks breathed, her eyes quivered. One might have thought a living woman was there, about to shake off that shroud of plaster and reveal herself to our eyes in the untrammelled grace of her youth. The father was silent now, but his countenance expressed so profound a piety of admiration that I comprehended why it was he had not hastened to remove the plaster from the rest of the fresco. His guileless artistic sense and the fervor of his faith made him feel the poesy of that divine smile and those divine eyes, imprisoned as it were in their coarse casing. We were all silent. Philippe was vanquished for the moment by the force of the impression, and I heard him murmur in a low voice: —

"Why, it 's Edgar Poe — it 's a bit of Shelley!"

The abbé, who certainly had never heard the name of either of those writers, said naïvely, without suspicion that he was making a just criticism on the sentiment of his young guest: —

"No, it 's a Gozzoli. I 'll prove it to you in Vasari. And what do you suppose is behind it? Undoubtedly the miracle of the girdle."

"What miracle is that?" I asked.

"Dear me!" he said, with visible amazement. "Did you not see in the Cathedral at Pistoia

the girdle of the Blessed Virgin which she threw to Saint Thomas after her assumption? He was absent when she rose to heaven in presence of the other apostles. He came back three days later, and as he still doubted the truth of everything he did not see, the Madonna was so good as to let fall her girdle before his eyes, that he might never doubt again."

He related this legend (which proves, we may remark in a parenthesis, that early Christianity foresaw even the analysts and their possible salvation) as he extinguished the rushlight, which he gave to Luigi; then he locked the door.

The single-minded conviction with which he spoke of the miracle proved to me that he lived in supernaturalism just as the rest of us, sons of our century, live in restlessness and irony. I could not help comparing him, in a way, to the fragment of the fresco he had shown us on the third wall. That uncovered bit of painting sufficed to make the whole blank sheet of plaster a living picture, and he, Dom Griffi, sufficed by his sole presence to make that convent desert a living scene. He was indeed the soul of it, — I felt this now, — and a soul which *represented*, in the exact sense of that word, the souls of his absent brethren. In my childhood I had seen an officer of the Grand Army passing along the pavement of the town in which I was brought up. The old hero limped, for he was wounded at Leipzig; he

was poor, and his ribbon hung upon a threadbare coat. Yet he was to me the whole epic of the Empire, for I knew that the Emperor had decorated him with his own hand. I felt the same impression now as I followed Dom Griffi. He bore his whole order in the folds of the old cassock which Luigi took such ill care of. Such is the grandeur which all absolute abdication of our own personality for the furtherance of some high and noble work bestows upon us. We renounce self, and in so doing we magnify it by a law which modern society, attached to vulgar individualism, strangely ignores. Man is of no value except as he immolates himself to an idea. What is an order, what is an army, if not an organized idea which assimilates to itself thousands of existences? Each of these existences has a share in the united forces of all the others. What would Dom Griffi have been in his convent? Probably an antiquary of narrow mind, who might have catalogued some museum; for no sooner had his enthusiasm abated, as we made our way back to our apartments, than he fell into the jargon of a collector who forgets the fundamental sentiment of a work of art in a discussion of its accessories, its resemblances, and its authenticity.

"A great deal has been written," he said, "on this very subject of the girdle of the Madonna, and Saint Thomas. You will find in the Acad-

emy at Florence a charming bas-relief of Luca della Robbia, where the Madonna, surrounded by angels, is giving her girdle to the apostle. Francesco Granacci treated the subject twice; so did Fra Paolino, of Pistoia, and Taddeo Gaddi, and Giovanni Antonio Sogliani, and Bastiano Mainardi, — the last at Santa Croce. My red mullets sent me photographs of all these pictures. I am certain our Benozzino's is best of all, judging only by that tiny bit of the Virgin's head. But please come into my cell, and I will show you those earrings and the little collection of Dom Pio Schedone."

We accepted the invitation, Philippe perhaps from archæological instinct, and I from curiosity to see the actual objects among which the old monk passed his life. The disorderly appearance of the first room into which he took us revealed the neglect of the comical servant who answered to the name of Luigi. Piles of books were scattered about, the size and binding of which proclaimed them the Fathers of the Church. In one corner were tools, hammers, a pair of pincers, and a box filled with nails and screws and old iron, showing that Dom Griffi was able to dispense with workmen if mending were needed for locks or furniture. Lemons were drying on a plate. Flasks, with the straw much blackened and soiled, seemed to contain samples of the last harvest of oil and wine.

One of those brown earthenware pots which Tuscan women call "scaldini," and which they fill with charcoal to warm their hands as they hold them by the handles, was the sole sign of comfort in the brick-floored room, where a jet black cat was lazily washing herself. Perhaps some English lady, grateful for his kindness, had sent the poor monk the little silver teapot, sole sign of elegance in this rustic capharnaüm, which Luigi had taken good care not to clean, and which now stood blackening on an upper shelf. A tall crucifix, resting on its base, overlooked the table, which was piled with sheets of paper covered in a large and firm hand-writing.

"Those are my master's sermons, which are sent to me to copy," said Dom Griffi. "The good cardinal is blind, and he wants to have his work printed before his death. He is eighty-seven. Ah! his writing is terribly *perfidious*," added the abbé, using the Italian idiom; "and besides, I have so little time. Happily, I can do with only four hours' sleep. Come, Nero, *mio micino, mio mutzi*, get out of that chair, get out of that chair." He spoke to the cat as Pasquale had spoken to his mare, and Nero, apparently comprehending him, jumped from the chair to the pile of papers which contained the old cardinal's claims to posthumous glory.

"Good; sit you there," he said to me; "and you here, Signor Filippo." He had asked our

Christian names at the beginning of dinner so that he might, with the charming familiarity of his country, call us by them. "Dear me!" he went on, looking about him, "where is that rascally box? I see it, under the volume of Fathers which I took down the other day to find a clause in the treatise of Saint Irenæus against the Gnostics. The question was about certain Basilideans who wished to avoid martyrdom on the ground that we ought not to make known our ideas to the common people. Ah! pride, pride! You 'll find pride at the bottom of all the heresies and all the sophisms. Faith is a great thing, and it is so easy and simple too. Here 's the box. It is open; I never lock anything in this room, because it belongs to me and not to the convent. Where are those earrings?"

While speaking he had disinterred a leather case or coffer, the lock of which was so complicated that in case of injury it would have defied the poor workmen of this remote spot. The cover raised, we saw that the box contained a quantity of small articles wrapped in paper and carefully ticketed. The circular shape of most of these packages clearly indicated that the greater part of the late Dom Pio's collection consisted of coins or medals. I noticed with some surprise that the workmanship of the Etruscan earrings was extremely delicate. Taking up at random one of the little round packages, I read on the

paper wrapping the words, "Julii Cæsarius aureus," and on examining the piece of gold I recognized it as genuine. I passed it to Philippe, who called my attention to a head of Mark Antony on the reverse, observing : —

"That 's a very fine coin, and extremely rare."

I took up a second, and a third, and then I came with still greater amazement upon a Brutus, the value of which I happened to know, in this wise. When selecting my New Year's presents in the preceding year I chanced to think of offering to certain ladies with whom I had dined little coins or medals to hang upon their bracelets ; and my dear friend Gustave S., one of the most distinguished numismatists of the present day, was kind enough to accompany me to a dealer who makes them a speciality. There I had greatly admired the gold coin which bears the head of the younger Brutus on one side, and on the other that of the elder. My friend could not restrain a smile at my ignorance when, in reply to my remark "I will take this one," the dealer said "Then to you, monsieur, as a friend of Monsieur S., it shall be only thirteen hundred francs." And this coin, which thus had a quotable market value, was here among fifty or sixty others in Dom Pio's collection ! An exclamation escaped me as I showed it to Philippe, and told him what I knew of its value.

"I can easily believe it," he said, "for I know something of numismatics; see how well preserved it is, the edge not worn."

"You have a treasure, Father," I said to Dom Griffi, who was listening without seeming to take our words seriously. I persisted, however, in explaining to him the grounds on which I could myself assure him of the value of at least one of his coins, and of my companion's ability to judge of the rest.

"Dom Pio always told me they were valuable," he said, his face gradually changing its expression. "He had picked them up here and there in his various excavations. When he died, poor Pio, things were at their worst with us; we had just been scattered, and I had so much to do that I neglected to have the collection examined by Professor Marchetti, whom you may have met at Pisa. In fact, I forgot all about it, and if it had not been for King Gondoforus and his jewels I should never have thought of looking at it. It was only the other day, while rummaging among these old books, that I happened to remember I had seen a curious pair of earrings in Dom Pio's possession. I looked in his box and found them, and now I have *happened* to speak of them to you. Bless me!" he continued, rubbing his hands. "I do hope you may be right. There's a terrace near the tower which is falling to ruin, and the government won't give me the money

to repair it; four thousand francs would be enough — but four thousand francs!" he added, shaking his head incredulously as he looked at the coffer.

"If I were you," I remarked, "I should consult the professor you mentioned, Father; for here's an *aureus* of Domitian which I think I have seen among rare coins."

"It is extremely rare," said Philippe, examining it; "and so is this Dide Julien, and that Didia Clara — splendid specimens! Probably some peasant found the treasure of a Roman legion, lost in battle near Volterra, and sold the whole to Dom Pio."

"If that were so," said the abbé, rubbing his hands again, "it would be another proof of how right the dear cardinal was when he used to say, 'Dio non manda mai bocca che non mandi cibo' — 'God doesn't send mouths without sending food.' How I have prayed for that terrace! That's where the sick brothers used to walk in the sun when they were getting well. I'll write to Monsieur Marchetti to come and pay me a visit as soon as he is able. Ah! he is a friend of mine; he likes to come to Monte-Chiaro. To-morrow morning when I say mass I shall thank the Lord and pray for both of you. Dear me! I had almost forgotten to tell Luigi to be ready to serve at six, for at seven I have several appointments."

"Can't you understand," I said to Philippe, a little later as I wished him good-night, "how readily certain circumstances — like these for instance — appear to be providential? This poor monk wants money for his convent; he prays to God with all his might; two strangers prove to him that he has the money in his own hand."

"Oh, the blundering of chance!" cried Philippe, shrugging his shoulders. "Have you ever heard of any young man of talent who needed a trifling sum of money to put him in the way of using his talents and found it? Did any great writer ever win a penny in a lottery? And yet I've known rich and stupid bourgeois in my province whose shares in the Ville de Paris brought them in as much as two hundred thousand francs. A cousin of mine left me a share. Happily I sold it. Would you believe that it has never turned up but once in ten years? It would n't have given me six, nor two, nor even one thousand francs. And here's this imbecile old cowl who will get his six thousand, — more, perhaps, — and spend them, how? in repairing a rotten terrace for monks who will never come back to it! Chamfort said the world was the work of a crazy devil; he had better have said an idiotic one."

"Meantime," I remarked with pretended petulance, as though I were speaking to a small child, — to avoid showing how provoked I felt at

what was, after all, a justifiable complaint, — "go to bed and to sleep, and let me do likewise."

As the wind had risen, — a melancholy autumn wind, — blowing gently, yet plaintively, about the convent, I found a certain difficulty in carrying out my own programme and in falling asleep on the rather hard bed of the late priors. I heard Philippe Dubois moving about his room, and I wondered whether, in spite of his ironical mood (too exaggerated to be perfectly genuine), he was not touched by the noble sight our host had shown us all that evening of a pious and self-devoted life. The priest's remarks on the providential character of certain meetings came back to me. Is it possible to think deeply and sincerely upon our own destiny and that of those nearest to us without a dim consciousness or intuition that a spirit hovers over us and guides us, by ways that are often tortuous, to ends of which we have no perception? Above all, in the punishment of our faults, does not this mysterious agent reveal its presence? — a presence recognized by the moralists of all ages, from the Greek poets who worshipped Nemesis, that mysterious universal equity, to Shakspeare and Balzac, the masters of modern art; for is not their work controlled by the vision of a final and mighty justice enveloping human life? So thinking, I began to make objections, from that wretched habit of see-

ing the pros and cons, which we cannot get rid of as easily and simply as our good host had done. I thought of that other law, the law of decadence, which requires the death of all things, even the noblest of human existence, from the moral being of a convent to the masterpieces of a glorious art. The frescos of Benozzo were just recovered, after a loss of four centuries, only to disappear again in a hundred or more years, destroyed then by the irresistible hand of Time. Yes, all dies, and all begins anew. Dom Griffi had spoken of the Basilideans, of their subtle theories and the pride which underlies all heresies. I remembered the astonishing analogy which struck me, when I studied the doctrines of Alexandria, between those famous paradoxes and the moral maladies of our own day. My young companion was a case in point; had he not maintained to me, apropos of the relations between a writer and the public, precisely that sophism of falsehood from contempt which was dear to the Gnostics? I heard him even then pacing his room, — was he restless? was he, too, discussing problems? — until at last, in the midst of contradictory arguments, I fell asleep; and when I woke in the morning, it was to see the innocent Luigi standing at my bed's head with a tray on which was my coffee; and almost at the same moment Dom Griffi entered the room.

"Ah, bravo!" he cried, with his cheery laugh; "you have slept well, and you have given the lie to an old proverb, *Chi dorme non piglia pesci*,— 'He who sleeps does n't catch fish;' for a peasant has brought you some fresh trout for your breakfast. As for Signor Filippo, he was off early on the mountain. When I returned from mass, about half-past six, I caught sight of him climbing beyond the village, as active as a cat. When you are ready we 'll go and see the Benozzos by daylight. By that time Signor Filippo will have got back, no doubt. You shall also see the convent library. Ah! if you only knew how rich it was before the first suppression, — I mean that of Napoleon I. Well, patience, patience, — all the more because we can now build up the terrace. 'Multa renascentur.'"

An hour later I was dressed and I had drunk, not without some grimaces, the coffee, based on chicory, made by Luigi. The father and I paid another visit to the Eastern king, Gondoforus, and to the "Smile of the Virgin." Dom Griffi found time to show me the refectories, small and large, the library, the chapels, the fish-pond, the cisterns, and the narrow garden where he was raising tiny cypresses, intending to plant them out. Philippe was still absent. Had he lost his way? Or did he feel an antipathy to the monk's society and conversation, such as nervous temperaments like his are unable to control? I

should have asked myself these questions with some indifference, I must admit, so annoying had his flippancy become to me, if, after returning to the convent about eleven o'clock, I had not been literally terrified by the result of a trifling circumstance, which was purely accidental, and which I myself had brought about without the smallest presentiment.

Dom Griffi had just excused himself. He was obliged to leave me alone until breakfast. I had no books with me. My correspondence, strange to say, was written up. "Suppose I look over those coins," I thought, and thereupon I asked the father for the coffer, which he kindly brought to me himself. Peaceably installed in my bedroom, I unfolded the papers one by one, admiring the profile of some laurel-crowned emperor, or the figure of a Victory. I don't know why the fancy took me to examine the *aureus* of Cæsar with the head of Antony. I looked for it among the others and could not find it. I took out the packages one by one, but the name of the dictator did not appear on any one of them. "We must have folded them wrong," I said to myself, and I took the trouble to undo each one. The coin of Cæsar was not among them; nor that of Brutus either. I think I never in my life felt an agony like that which gripped my heart when I felt certain that the two coins, worth over two thousand francs, which

had been in the box the night before, were no longer there. I had held them in my own hand. I had examined them with a glass; I had myself revealed their probable price to Dom Griffi, — and they had disappeared! I hoped he might have put them aside, in consequence of what we said, so as to send them to Pisa and verify their genuineness as soon as possible. I ran to his cell at the risk of interrupting him; it was impossible for me not to relieve my mind instantly. Dom Griffi was engaged in recovering a debt from a tall sun-burnt rogue of a peasant, who was holding in his horny hand a leather pocket-book, from which he drew, with comic regret, various paper notes of the value of five and ten francs. The abbé saw by my face that I had something important to say.

"Your friend is not ill?" he inquired hastily.

"No" I answered. "But let me ask you one question, Father. Did you take any of those gold coins we were handling yesterday from Dom Pio's box?"

"None; I took none," he answered simply; "the box remained just where we left it."

"Great God!" I exclaimed in terror, "at least two are missing, and the most valuable, — the Cæsar and the Brutus."

I had no sooner uttered the words than I felt the full force of their bearing. No one, until our arrival, had suspected the money value of

Dom Pio's collection. The Cæsar and the Brutus were the very coins we had chiefly noticed. They had been stolen. Luigi certainly would not have selected them from the others, nor would any of the peasants, like the rustic I could see at this moment fingering his dirty bank-bills with a clumsy hand. On the other hand, I myself could not be suspected. I was in my bed when the father said mass and his room was left empty. Since then he and I had been together. The flash of an intolerable evidence made me cry out: —

"No, no, it is impossible!"

I had a vision of Philippe, tempted, almost immediately after our conversation of the night before, by the close proximity of the little treasure. The sound of his steps late in the night echoed in my memory, and brought with them a dreadful explanation. He had said so much to me during our journey of his great need of a sum of money to support him while starting on his career in Paris. He had seen that sum within his grasp. He had struggled, struggled, and then, — he had yielded. He was guilty of this theft, so easy to commit, and so doubly infamous inasmuch as the poor old monk was our hospitable entertainer. He must have risen a little before the hour of service. He had left his chamber. He had slipped into the now empty cell of his host. He had taken the two coins

which he knew to be most valuable, and probably others. Then he had left the convent and walked about the country, no doubt to give some reason for his early rising and perhaps to quell the anguish which must have shaken him; for between the paradoxes of the boldest intellectual immorality and a shameful action like this there is a gulf. In presence of this horrible and overwhelming probability I was seized with such emotion that my legs gave way and I was forced to sit down, while Dom Griffi said to the peasant with his customary gentleness: —

"Go and wait in the corridor, Peppe. I'll call you."

When we were alone he turned to me.

"Now, my son," he began, in a voice I had not yet heard him use, not the voice of a kindly host, but that of a priest, as he took both my hands in his, "look me in the face. You feel that I know it was not you, do you not? Say nothing, explain nothing, and make me a promise —"

"To compel that unhappy man to make restitution. Ah! Father, if I have to wrench those coins from his hands or deliver him myself to the police."

"You have not guessed my meaning," he said, shaking his head. "I wish you, on the contrary, to promise me on your honor that you will not let drop a word which can make him suspect that you have discovered the loss of

those coins, — not one word, do you understand me? and not one gesture. I have a right to ask this, have I not?"

"I don't understand," I began.

"Pazienza," he said, employing his favorite word, "give me your promise, and then let me finish with that dreadful Peppe. Ah! these peasants will be the death of me before I get the brothers back again. They squabble, franc by franc, over the payment of their leases; but then, you know, we must shut our eyes and commend ourselves to God. Have I your promise?"

"You have," I replied, yielding to a species of authority which seemed to emanate from his person at that moment.

"And will you bring the coffer to me at once?"

"I will fetch it, Father."

In spite of my promise I could scarcely contain myself when, half an hour after this interview, I met Philippe Dubois returning from his walk. I must say to his credit that his face betrayed an inward anxiety which would have fully convinced me of his guilt had I retained the slightest doubt of it. He must have felt sure of his secret however, for my second examination of Dom Pio's collection was the merest accident, and no one but me could have missed the stolen coins. We had mentioned them too

briefly for the monk to remember their names. Therefore it was no fear of discovery that gave so gloomy an expression of uneasiness to that intelligent brow and to the eyes that were so lively only the night before. I guessed that remorse and shame were rending him. He was so young, in spite of the cynical mask he chose to wear, so near to the hearth of home, so nurtured in provincial loyalty in spite of his intellectual depravity! He noticed my depressed manner, but if at first he suspected its true cause the silence I maintained in accordance with my promise must have reassured him.

"I have had a splendid walk," he said, without my asking him a single question as to how he had spent the morning. "Only I lost my way, and have got back too late to go over the convent. I don't regret that; I should be sorry to spoil the impression of last night by seeing those frescos in broad daylight. At what time do we start?"

"About half-past two," I replied.

"Then" said he, "if you will allow me, I will go and fasten my valise."

He went into his room on that pretext, and I heard him walking up and down as he had done during the night. My presence was evidently intolerable to him. How would it be when he met the abbé? I dreaded, with an uneasiness which was actual suffering, the moment when

we should all three be seated at the table of the refectory, forced to converse, the priest and I knowing what we did know, and he with this weight on his heart. Curiosity, I must admit, was mingled with my uneasiness. In demanding my absolute silence Dom Griffi must certainly have had some purpose. Did he hope to induce the young man to confess privately, and so humiliate him as little as possible? Or, with the divine mercy which shone in his eyes — the eyes of a true believer — had he resolved to forgive in silence, and rely upon what was left of Dom Pio's collection to rebuild the terrace? At any rate the breakfast hour came, as all hours come; Dom Griffi called us himself in his usual cheery and cordial voice.

"Well, Signor Filippo," he said, grasping both the young man's hands affectionately, "you must be hungry after your walk."

"No, Father," answered Philippe, who seemed disturbed by the friendly pressure, "but I am afraid I have taken cold."

"Then you must drink a little of my 'vino santo,'" replied the monk. "Do you know why we give it that name? We hang the grapes to dry till Easter-day, and then we press them. There 's a Tuscan proverb: *Nell' uva sono tre vinaccioli,* — 'there are three 'seeds in a grape;' *uno di sanità, uno di letizia, e uno di ubriachezza,* — 'one of health, one of gayety, one of

intoxication.' But in my 'vino santo' there are only the first two."

He kept up a series of cheerful and kindly remarks throughout the meal, which consisted of the promised trout, roasted chestnuts, eggs in an omelet supposed to be fried, and thrushes — those thrushes gorged with grapes and juniper which are the autumn luxury of this ever-blessed region of Italy.

"I have never been able to eat a single one of those little birds," said the father, "they fly so near to me here. But our peasants catch them with birdlime. Have n't you noticed the men and boys with tame owls. They lay sticks covered with lime round the vineyards. Then they put an owl on the ground fastened to another stick. It hops about here and there. The birds are attracted by curiosity. They light on the sticks and are caught. I am surprised that no poet has ever made a tale of that little picture."

Not an allusion to the lost coins, not a word! Not one word either to show a difference in his regard towards me and towards my companion; possibly there was something a little more caressing in his manner to Philippe, who, I saw plainly, was overcome by the almost affectionate kindness of the man he had so basely betrayed. A score of times I saw tears at the rim of his eyelids; evidently he was not born to evil.

Twenty times I was on the point of saying to him, "Ask pardon of this saint, and make an end of it." But instantly as the moisture came, he would frown, his nostrils contracted, the fire of pride would quench the tears within his lids, and the conversation went on, or rather, I should say the monologues of Dom Griffi, who presently compared his beloved Monte-Chiaro with Monte-Oliveto, and spoke with tenderness of a friend of his, who is also a friend of mine, the dear Abbé de N——, who had undertaken a duty like his own. Then he told us many anecdotes about the convent, some of them very interesting, — one, for instance, of a visit of the Constable de Bourbon on his way to Rome, when he secretly ordered the prior to say a mass for his soul, naming the day which did actually succeed his death. Other tales were naïve and childlike, and related mostly to local legends. It was not till after the meal was over and we had returned to our sitting-room that I fathomed his intention and understood the idea suggested to him by his knowledge of the human heart, — knowledge which none but a confessor can ever really obtain. Having left us for a few moments he returned with Dom Pio's coffer in his hand. I glanced at Philippe. He had turned livid. But the wrinkled face of the monk gave no sign of stern arraignment.

"You have taught me the value of these

coins," he said simply, as he placed the box on the table. "There are more than I need to repair the terrace. Do me the favor to select two or three for each of you, and keep them in memory of an old monk who prayed for you both this morning."

He looked at me as he said the words as if to remind me of my promise. Then he left the room, and Philippe Dubois and I remained alone and motionless. I trembled lest the guilty man should guess that I knew his secret. The divine mercy of Dom Griffi, destined to produce a well-nigh blasting repentance through excessive shame, could only have its full effect on this anguished soul if the gall of wounded self-love were not present.

"What is better than a good priest?" I said at last, merely to break the silence.

Philippe made no answer. He turned hastily to the window and looked at the green prospect we had so much admired on our arrival; he was plunged in thought. I opened the coffer and took a coin at random to obey our entertainer; then I went into my bedroom. My heart was beating hard. Presently I heard the young man rush away; quick, quick rang his footsteps in the direction of the monk's cell. His pride was conquered. He had gone to return the stolen coins and confess his fault. In what words he addressed the father he had so insolently

compared to the late Hyacinthe, and how the latter answered him, I shall never know. But when we were once more in the carriage and Pasquale was saying to his mare, "Come, Zara, show your legs." I turned to give another glance at the convent we were leaving and to bow to the abbé; and as I did so I saw in the look which my companion was casting on the simple monk *the dawn of another soul.* No, the era of miracles is not over, but saints are needed, and they — are scarce.

# II.

## MONSIEUR LEGRIMAUDET.

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To Francis Magnard.

## II.

## MONSIEUR LEGRIMAUDET.

### I. His Life.

Since my advent into that mysterious region which is called the World of Letters, I have been in the way of studying so many original characters, so many paradoxical existences that the Z. Marcas of Balzac and the nephew of Rameau, drawn from the life by the boldest prose writer of the eighteenth century, seem to me quite natural. But among them all I have never known so strange a being as a professional parasite, an enemy of the great Diderot, a personal and malignant enemy as though he were the worst of rivals, Monsieur Jean Legrimaudet. He is now dead, and his calumnious book against the Encyclopedists, which obtained, in 1855, a certain reactionary success, is now forgotten. Forgotten likewise are his two volumes against Victor Hugo, a tissue of fantastic tales, of anecdotes as silly and false as they were scandalous. I forget who it was who said of him, with a laugh: "Legrimaudet! his style is our best protection against his calumny;" and it

is a fact that neither the phraseology of this quill-driver, his vague and pretentious rhetoric, the credulous imbecility of his information (always puerile and usually inexact), nor the silly intolerance of a so-called catholicism, which consists in outlawing all adversaries suspected of free thought,— in short, nothing in the books which he has left behind him gives the slightest idea of the originality, the, if I may so express it, carnal originality of the lampooner himself.

By a singular caprice of accident the coming of each new year brings before me (I will presently tell why) the vanished face of a genuine Diogenes, whom my eyes have seen, to whom my ears have listened. The temptation has now come to me to sketch, in two studies, the portrait of this solitary, who lived a lonelier life in Paris than Crusoe on his isle. To begin with, I shall relate the incident which connects in an odd way in my mind the recollection of this man with the close of the month of December. Possibly those persons who are curious about eccentricities may study with interest these "sketches from nature." Perhaps some reader addicted to practical conclusions will find in this simple tale one proof the more in support of the great precept of the gospel, so profound and so misunderstood: "Judge not." I have often thought that the highest moral aim of a work of art — I am speaking now of literary art — should

consist in deepening our sense of the mystery hidden in the depths of each human being, the most pitiable, the most comic, or the most sublime. "The soul of another," as Tourguénief said, "is a darksome forest." Ah, what true words! whoso keeps them living in his mind will spare himself the commission of much daily injustice and many cruelties to the hearts of others, — most of which are, in truth, mere deeds of ignorance.

When I met Legrimaudet for the first time, in 1874, it was towards the end of autumn, at the rooms of the earliest comrade of my youth, André Mareuil, who was for a time the fashionable newsmonger of the day, and then — what? But at the period of which I now write Mareuil was fulfilling the humble duty of assistant librarian at the Bibliothèque Nationale; and it was about this time that he began to exhibit a sort of childish taste for what he considered a life of elegance. On a salary of eighteen hundred francs, he lived near the Parc Monceau, under the eaves of a monstrously tall house. There it was that I one day found, installed in the chimney corner of my friend's little study, a man about sixty years of age, of squalid appearance, who was resting his feet on the fire irons, — two horrible feet, deformed by bunions and chilblains as others are by gout, and tortured

into boots bought evidently at a bargain, or given by some ungenerous benefactor who wanted to get rid of them. The head of this person would have caused the most ignorant Philistine in matters of art to exclaim, "That 's a Daumier!" — so faithfully did it reproduce the favorite type of that tragic draughtsman. Gray hair that was greenish in spots framed a cadaverous face, a gray and withered face, where two small, filmy eyes blinked in their reddened lids with a spite that was almost savage. A sunken mouth, a dirty beard, wrinkles that made black lines across his face, were all in keeping with the shabby high silk hat which the stranger held on his knees, the wetting of innumerable showers being visible on its nap. The man wore a dress-coat, stranded — after what strange vicissitudes? — on his back. A coat, did I say? no, the ghost of a coat, a spidery tissue, every thread of which was worn till the whole web seemed ready to give way at a touch; it was buttoned in front over a knitted jersey that was once maroon. A blue cravat knotted round a ravelled shirt-collar, and a pair of ragged trousers completed the shabbiness by which society recognizes a positive and incurable outcast, the victim of life reduced to live in beggary, but who still retains, even in his worst distress, a certain middle-class bearing and manner which distinguishes him from the broken-down workman.

Though I was then very young and knew but little of the varieties of that vast species, the beggars of literature, I could not fail to recognize in the strange guest who was warming his tatters before Mareuil's fire a parasite of the lower walks of the profession. My friend did not name him at first; he seemed to enjoy the curiosity. I felt in the picturesque stranger, who, for his part, took no notice of my existence. His whole person had an air of outrageous insolence, which clothed him like a panoply and rebuffed all pity. I heard of his saying once, in speaking of his clothes, —

"I am the one Frenchman who wears a coat well. I have worn this coat for fifteen years."

And it was said in good faith. His whole bearing revealed an overwhelming self-conceit, condensed into contempt for every one about him, as I had reason to see in this first interview. While André and I were conversing we happened to mention the "Journal de Lestoile," which my friend was then reading; and he showed me a curious copy, with marginal notes of its own time, which he had borrowed from his Library. The visitor, who had not opened his mouth since my entrance except to spit noisily into the fire, suddenly asked Mareuil to let him look at the book.

He took it in his fleshless hand (by the thinness of which I could guess the emaciation of

his poor body), turned over a few pages, and then, returning it to André, he remarked, —

"It is a vile business that of a librarian. They are so tempted. They all end by stealing the books entrusted to them. Good evening, monsieur."

He rose to take leave after uttering this amazing impertinence. I saw that Mareuil was struggling with an inclination to laugh.

"Wait a moment;" he said, "I wish to present you to each other." He named me, and then, with great solemnity, he said: "Monsieur Jean Legrimaudet, the personal enemy of Diderot and Hugo, the author of the 'History of Drunkenness in Literature.'"

"Is monsieur a literary man?" asked Legrimaudet.

"Poet," replied Mareuil.

"Ah, monsieur is a poet" (he pronounced the word "poat"). "Then write me an ode, monsieur, write me an ode. Do you know what Veuillot calls a poet? A lascivious sparrow. So when he published his own verses I made the following epigram upon him: —

Veuillot,
Promiscuous
Sparrow
Lascivious.

I am therefore your brother in Apollo. Monsieur, and dear comrade, adieu."

With this jest, uttered in a sour tone, he departed, without my being able to understand whether he was in joke or in earnest, whether he was rambling in mind, or whether his pretended wit — and what wit! — concealed some low meaning. He had no sooner crossed the threshold of the door than Mareuil gave way to shouts of laughter as I asked him: —

"What sort of being is he? Can he be the living illustration of some book of his? Why do you receive such queer fellows?"

"Queer? yes, that he is," said André. "But, I can't help it, I 've an unwholesome taste for him. He amuses me. Everybody has a hobby in this low world, and mine is to compel him to say 'Thank you.' Does that puzzle you? Well, I swear I 'm in earnest. I have been working for that result the last two years, and I see no chance of obtaining it. I have done him a score of favors; I have paid his rent, I have bought his clothes, I have sent him wine when he was ill, employed a doctor, furnished drugs, — and in return I have never got anything, if you 'll believe me, but insolence like that we have just heard. You remember our old friend D'Altaï and his weakness in trying to hide his age. Well, he fed Legrimaudet for twenty years. Now guess what the latter did last year. He wrote to the mayor of poor D'Altaï's native town for the record of his benefactor's birth. It cost

him three or four francs, and he is only worth about two sous. He then procured some of that type cut in brass, such as children play with, and before long about a hundred of us received cards each bearing the words 'November 2, 1810. Birthday of young Monsieur d'Altaï.' A mere nothing, but true malice. Ah! I do believe him to be a thorough villain, but without committing crime, remember. They ought to create a title for him, — the Great Thankless of France. He is quite sincere. Ever since he wrote his Hugo book he considers himself a celebrated writer cruelly persecuted. I 'm telling you the truth; I swear it is a true portrait."

I remember that I made no reply to my friend's sally. About this period he was professing a dandyism of misanthropy which I have still much difficulty in understanding. Human infamy cheered him into a gayety which I thought horrible, but which he managed to combine with the utmost delicacy of friendship. When, sometime later, I happened to read Flaubert's correspondence I met with an identical sentiment, — the avowal of ferocious gayety in presence of moral foulness. Is it merely one of the phenomena of a morbid condition, the suffering of a wounded sensibility which will not admit the wound, but conceals it under this peculiar form of irony? Is it the melancholy sat-

isfaction of a pessimism which delights in verifying its doctrines by the spectacle of the lowest depths to which that pretentious animal called man is capable of descending? Or, does there still remain in certain civilized beings, hidden in their inner consciousness, a feeling analogous to that worship of monsters which appears in certain primitive religions, — an instinct partly cruel, and which in latter times explains the presence of dwarfs about a king, like those deformed creatures whose ugliness is immortalized by Velasquez in the museum on the Prado? When I scolded André for this tendency of his mind, which I could not prevent myself from considering as degrading, saying frankly, "You ought to be ashamed of it," he would answer with a "Yes, Prudhomme," which silenced me. I therefore refrained from reproving his sentiments about Legrimaudet. I thought in my own mind that my paradoxical friend had once more misplaced his fancy on a miserable and grotesque individual; and, in spite of his clever silhouette of this literary vagabond, I should probably have forgotten all about the man if chance had not brought me again in contact with the Great Thankless of France, under circumstances which I was not likely to forget.

A fortnight went by after my visit to André. We were then in the latter half of November.

It was one of those cold afternoons, clear and dry, when the laziest of men enjoys a walk along the clean pavements as he breathes the crisp air of a cloudless sky. I was returning at a quick pace along the streets which led to the old Sorbonne, where I was following a course of lectures on Greek philosophy in the "École des Hautes Études," when I stopped before the booth of a dealer in second-hand books and began to turn some of the leaves. Need I say that my vocation as Hellenist was not at all serious, and that I was not searching on an open bookstall for the works of either Sophocles or Demosthenes? My "finds" were volumes published under the head of romance. The stamp of Urbain Canel was more precious to me far than that of Elzevir. I acquired thus, in these gleanings along the by-ways of the Latin quarter, certain books which to this day bring back the freshest and sweetest joys of my apprentice years, — Merimée's "La Jacquerie," from the press of Honoré Balzac, printer of the rue Visconti; "The British Opium-Eater," by A. D. M., a thin little volume written by Musset not long before the "Spanish Tales;" and the "Rouge et Noir," of Beyle, published by Levavasseur with a current change of title on each page, following the text. On this fine, cool November day my quest for first editions may have seemed to me less interesting than usual, for I turned to examine — instead of the stall be-

fore me — the interior of the shop, where second-hand books were piled in tottering heaps, and a number of the bibliomaniac brotherhood were standing about. There may have been four or five of them, all poorly but decently clad, watched apparently by a shopman, in whom I recognized with amazement the parasite of my friend Mareuil, the beggar who had never said 'Thank you,' Monsieur Jean Legrimaudet himself. I was not mistaken. Even if his general appearance had misled me, each detail would have convinced me that I was right, and that it was he himself, unaccountably in charge of the shop, with his rusty old hat on his greenish white hair; himself, with his shapeless boots worn down at heel; himself, with the blue cravat knotted around his ragged shirt-collar; himself, with that lank and insolent face of his, wan and bitter, inexpressive and scoundrelly; himself, in short, in his threadbare coat almost diaphanous from usage, buttoned across that faded shirt. With his hands buried in the over-long sleeves of his coat as in a muff, he was walking up and down behind the bookstall. Every now and then the knotty hands were protruded from the rotten cloth to take some volume from a humble reader of the kind who swarm round these stalls to inhale the treasures of a book, as other foodless beings smell a meal behind the gratings of a restaurant. While thus employed in a species

of police work the discolored face of Monsieur Legrimaudet seemed more arrogant than ever. Not a word fell from his contemptuous lips as he renewed his watchful pacings. Certainly I could not be suspected of sharing my friend's sympathy for this odious pamphleteer, for the calumniator of the noble dead and the noble living, of Diderot and of Hugo. But all the same I could not escape a painful feeling in my heart as I watched him thus employed, — the author of several volumes and a man of letters, after all. On the other hand, how came he to have this employment, if his friend and protector, Mareuil, knew nothing about it? He continued to pace up and down, without deigning to recognize or even to look at me, with a sort of impassibility under extreme misery which reminded me of an anecdote related, I think, by the Abbé de Pradt of a soldier of the imperial guard. After the retreat from Russia the abbé saw this soldier leaning on his gun in the courtyard of the embassy at Warsaw, and sound asleep as he stood. The priest woke him gently, saying, "You had better go to bed, my brave fellow." "Ah!" replied the man, "they are always waking me too early;" and again he went to sleep, still standing. The immovable face of Legrimaudet showed an equal endurance, all things considered, to that of the emperor's veteran. But how came he there, the watchman of

a booth? Had he lately accepted the situation to escape the degradation of begging? Did he conceal this employment from his benefactors to add his meagre profits to their alms? The mystery was soon explained, for presently another old man came up to Legrimaudet; comfortably clad, this one, for he was wrapped in a goat-skin coat, his hands were covered with mittens held round his neck by a string, on his head was a cap with ear-pads, and his feet were protected by woollen socks and galoshes. His ruddy complexion and the blue veins traced upon his rubicund cheeks told of frequent libations and plentiful repasts. At the first words of the new-comer I knew that I saw before me the owner of the establishment, and that his substitute had only supplied his place for an hour to oblige him.

"Here I am, Monsieur Legrimaudet," he said, gayly. "I've not tried your patience too long, have I?"

"Give me the book I want," said the old writer, without deigning to reply to the semi-excuse of the librarian. "In these winter months the daylight is soon over, and I get little time to study. I go to bed at six o'clock. That's not your way of living."

"Oh, I," said the other, — "no. I play a little game with a few friends as soon as the blinds are fastened and the dinner eaten; but by

eleven o'clock, good-night, everybody goes away. Here are your two volumes."

"Well, good-by," said Legrimaudet, taking the books. "Take care of yourself, monsieur, take care of yourself. Remember your brother died in a fit; such things run in families, and considering the life you lead in cafés, and at your age — hum! you ought to be careful. Good-by."

Had he suddenly noticed that I was close by him as he made that speech, and did he only then recognize me? Or, having waited in vain till I should bow to him while he watched the books, did he feel a desire to let loose upon me a few of his jeering epigrams, the absurdity of which was steeped in gall? At any rate he had no sooner taken leave of the librarian than he approached me, and taking off his hat with a flourish, he cried: —

"I salute you, monsieur le poète. How is your muse? And your friend, Monsieur Mareuil, is he as melancholy as ever? I don't know what the young men of the present day mean by being as dismal as a night-cap. When I was of your age, monsieur, I was a gay dog. Is that the ode in my honor that I see in your hand?" he added, catching sight of a roll of paper that I held under my arm.

"No," I answered, naïvely; "merely notes on lectures I am attending at the Sorbonne."

"Oh, indeed! then you are a student over there? Tell me, worthy scholar, have you the same provost who was there last year?"

"Yes, the same," I answered. "Do you know him?"

"He is an ass," he said, briefly. "Do you want me to prove it to you?"

"I have always heard him mentioned, on the contrary, as a really distinguished scholar."

"Distinguished! distinguished! Well, you shall judge." I kept pace with him, carried away by an overpowering curiosity, while he went on: "You know, of course, what a noise was made in the world of letters about my 'Household and Finances of Victor Hugo.' Ha! I lived in a species of intoxication for two years! I couldn't open a newspaper without reading my name."

This was true, but he forgot to add that it was usually coupled with some epithet, such as rogue, vermin, scavenger, abject scoundrel, black-mailer, sponger, and other amenities of that nature.

"Monsieur," he continued, "I have a trunk full of those articles. When I am alone in my own room I often read them over. I measure my fame by the insults of those who envy me. I have letters from distinguished personages. A great functionary in Japan wrote to congratulate me. The Bishop of Orleans thanked me for my last book, offering me his respects, a thing no

bishop has ever before done to a layman. Well, monsieur, I received a letter last year from your provost requesting me to call upon him about a matter which concerned me. I debated in my own mind: 'What can he want of me? To offer me the cross, no doubt. Holding my opinions can I accept it from the Republic? Pooh, I could wear it in travelling —' Finally I made up my mind and I kept the appointment. I went to that Sorbonne of yours. They made me wait. Those professors have n't an idea of the value of time to us writers. At last I was shown in, and what do you suppose your distinguished provost said to me? 'Monsieur Legrimaudet, you have asked assistance from the minister of public instruction as a literary man; have you published any books?'"

"What did you reply?" I asked; for he stopped speaking and looked full in my face for the flash of indignation which this ignorance of his genius should have brought there.

"I rose," he replied, "and I said to him, 'So you don't know the books in your library? Mine are all there; go and read them, — they 'll teach you something;' and I departed."

"But the assistance you wanted?" I said.

"Monsieur, that ignorant fool, very naturally, made them refuse it. But I 'm used to that. It is all envy. Beware of talent, monsieur; be like your friend, Monsieur Mareuil, who has n't any.

He is commonplace, third-rate, and he succeeds. He steps on nobody's toes. As for me, monsieur, just at that time all my Mecænases were absent. I had n't a farthing. I used to buy two sous' worth of fried potatoes on credit. It is hard for a man when he 's illustrious to come down to such petty loans."

He uttered this speech in so passionate a tone that it did not occur to me to laugh at it; moreover, behind the incredible folly of his conceit I perceived an abyss of wretchedness before which all sense of ridicule and all repugnances were wiped out. Almost without reflection I still followed him. We passed up the rue Soufflot. As the dome of the Panthéon rose before us Legrimaudet glanced at the inscription on the pediment with a strange look. I began to think Mareuil less inexplicable for his interest in this social rebel, who was evidently thinking in his own mind that the nation would fail in its mission if after his death no place was found for him in this temple to great men, and I said to him: —

"Are you alone in the world? Have you no family, no relatives? What part of France do you come from?"

"You are very superficial, monsieur," he said gravely. "What region of our country do you suppose I could come from if not from that of Bossuet? Monsieur, I am from Dijon. My

father was a baker there, like the father of General Drouot. At ten years of age I amazed that town by the precocity of my intellect. I went to the seminary in the first place, and then to the clerical college. But I preached too well, monsieur; I excited the jealousy of the bishop himself, and I left before graduating; otherwise I might now have been a cardinal. Still, I don't regret it; I could n't have written my 'Diderot' with such vigor if I had never come to Paris."

"Did you come here when you left college? That must be a long time ago," I said.

"Very long," he replied, evasively. "First, I got a place as clerk in a lawyer's office, thanks to a cousin of mine who is dead — no brains but a good heart! This clerkship was a great help to me for my 'Hugo,' monsieur. I learned to understand business, and I was fully prepared to examine the accounts of the so-called poet and his publishers. I might have stayed at the bar; I was well fitted for it. But the gift of writing is inexorable. My fingers itched for the pen. When my father died I inherited fifteen thousand francs and I plunged into literature. My career began with the 'History of Great Men,' but the true bent of my genius was still to seek. When I found it I began my 'Diderot.' That was about the time of the Coup d'État. I published it. Monsieur, in spite of the turmoil in politics that book made a great noise. Then

it was that envy and jealousy became so bitter against me. Never since have they let me go. All the newspapers and all the publishing houses have turned their backs upon me. My own profession has persecuted me. They sought to silence me, monsieur, and they chose a sure means — hunger."

"Did you never think of getting a situation of some sort where you could support yourself and write in off hours?"

"A situation! Consider the value of my time, monsieur. I have not enough time as it is to compose. Besides, I have no fears for the future — it is a mere question of patience."

"Do you expect to inherit property?" I asked, surprised at the confident tone with which this white-haired tatterdemalion spoke of the future. The future! why, to him it was the hospital, the dissecting-table, at best a pauper's grave! And yet an indescribable flash of chimerical hope lighted up his surly countenance. Ignominy made way for mystic lights!

"Monsieur," he said, "cut me a lock of your hair, and I will have your horoscope drawn for you. I know the somnambulist who predicted the success of Napoleon III. when he consulted her in the disguise of a jockey. This is a fact. I put her to sleep myself in 1855. I am a powerful magnetizer. She used to give me my breakfast, and I went there every day from twelve

o'clock to three. We quarrelled after a time because she advised me not to publish my "Hugo." She was right enough on the score of my peace of mind. She predicted that I should die a rich man and a senator; therefore I can borrow money without feeling ashamed of doing so. All my loans are entered in a ledger; they will all be paid. Your friend Mareuil has an account with me. Yes, every farthing will be paid. If not," he added, in a smothered voice, "I renounce God; I will die damned —"

We had passed the Panthéon and were now at the angle of the rue de la Vieille-Estrapade when Monsieur Legrimaudet stopped short to utter that sentence. There is, I must believe, in open, avowed self-conceit driven to its paroxysm a mighty power of fascination; for this cry, this extravagant outburst of indomitable confidence in his heritage of fame, uttered by the miserable creature before my eyes, grasped me for a moment like some weird poesy. The voices of the schoolboys in a college play-ground alone broke the silence of this provincial part of Paris — the Paris in which my companion had managed to construct himself so fantastic an existence of illusions and infamy. Perhaps he felt the need of thinking aloud; for, resuming his walk and drawing me in the direction of the rue Tournefort through a labyrinth of by-ways quite unknown to me, he continued: —

"Monsieur, five months ago, when this distress came upon me, the worst I have ever known, I despaired. I wished to kill myself. I thought of the means. I had a mind to hang myself on the statue of the leader of the Encyclopedists, Voltaire, to cast shame upon my own party. Just at that very moment I received a legacy. A widow, who had been my neighbor, gave me all her husband's clothes. Clothes-dealers are thieves; but out of this windfall I managed to get enough money to live on. Another edition of my 'Hugo,' came out, — a splendid affair in spite of the cabal. Monsieur, I don't need much. With five hundred francs a year I am rich. That surprises you because you don't know how to live. Count it up. I have a very good room for fifteen francs a month in a large house in the rue de la Clef, close by here. It is a place for workmen, but that does n't matter to me. They know me under the name of Monsieur Jean. I reserve until I become a rich man the satisfaction of making known that a Legrimaudet was reduced to live in such a place by the jealousy of his contemporaries. My room has a chimney, which is very useful to me in cooking; in fact, that is why I have kept it in spite of a great defect — it has only a skylight, and when the snow falls I cannot open the window to clear it, and the room is dark all day. But it 's a great thing to be able to warm your

food. That quarter is full of cookshops on account of the workmen. If you were to meet me of a morning, monsieur, when I go for provisions with a tin box under my arm, in which I put my purchases, you would think I was carrying a paté that cost six francs. Let me tell you, people ought to know how to buy, and where, and when. In the rue du Pot-de-Fer Saint-Marcel there's an eating house. Wednesdays the owner serves the customers himself and he's generous, — as generous as a thief. For seven sous I get a portion large enough to last me two days. Saturday is roast-meat day, because it is pay-day. But you must choose your dealers carefully. If you go a little way up the rue du Faubourg Saint-Jacques (I'll give you the address, and be careful to go before nine o'clock) you can get a fine slice of rare roast-beef. Those days I breakfast better than Monsieur Hugo, in spite of his ill-gotten millions and his avarice. Two sous' worth of bread, and I'm ballasted for work. At ten o'clock, unless I am forced to go elsewhere, I'm in the Bibliothèque Nationale, and there I stay till four, reading and making notes. I read a great deal. I read the whole of Bayle last year. It is immensely overdone. Towards five o'clock I get home and prepare my wine-soup or my milk-tea. The latter is only milk and tea, but I like that double meaning, — it is my lethe, for after it I go to

sleep. In summer I generally go after dinner to the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève. In winter I go to bed at six o'clock on account of the cold. The nights are long. I wake up about two. This quarter is full of convents ; and that is very convenient, for you don't need a watch. I light my pipe and smoke in bed without a lamp. Those are my hours of inspiration. I have lately been planning another book ; for which, by the by, I need these two volumes."

"May I ask the subject ?" I said.

"No, monsieur ; I know literary life too well to tell any one the subject of a book before I publish it."

This discourse, begun, interrupted, and renewed among the countless turns of the narrow by-ways, had brought us to the nest of houses which cluster about Sainte-Pélagie, and I read on a corner house the name of the rue de la Clef. I have not gone through that quarter of Paris for many years, and I do not know whether it still swarms, as it did then, with common boarding-houses of a sinister aspect, mingled with the open shop-fronts of Auvergnats, displaying the heterogeneous rubbish from which those sons of the Cantal manage to derive a certain number of copper sous. The street is populated by old clothes-dealers, and this may have led one of their number to open a house of furnished

lodgings, before the door of which Legrimaudet now stopped me. The front wall bore the following inscription: "Hôtel de l'Écu and de Saint-Flour united." The wine-shop, which occupied one half of the ground-floor, had another sign, meaningless to all minds except that of a compatriot of Vercingétorix and Pascal, "Wines of Coran and of Chanturgue." On the other side, the shop window of a laundry displayed the doubtful freshness of some shabby, bluish linen; while a door beside it, with a lattice painted green, gave to view at the end of a passage a damp staircase leading to the bedrooms, which, to judge by the yellow frontage reeking with filth, by the windows which had no blinds, by the settling of the building as though it were sinking into itself, must have been like the dens of the galley slaves. It was indeed the true home of a Legrimaudet, the lair of the outcast writer of scurrilous books! He had been silent ever since we turned the corner of the street, and seemed to be unconscious of my presence. I noticed, just before we reached the house of which I speak, that he fumbled in the pockets of his coat and drew out a package, which I saw to be a cake wrapped in paper. He took off the paper and held the cake in his hands; then, with a smile I should never have expected to see on those venomous lips, he approached a child about six years old, who was playing in front of the laundry — a

poor little puny fellow, pallid and emaciated, the mere sight of whom leaping like a wounded insect was enough to wring the heart. He was lame, and when he ran he managed a light crutch with much dexterity.

"Good morning, Henri," said Legrimaudet. "How are you to-day? I have brought you a nice cake."

The child looked at the old writer with a cruel expression of repugnance. He took the cake and smelled it. The awkward fingers of the old man had left their marks upon the frosting.

"It is almost as dirty as you are yourself," said the boy, who went off to his playmates, munching the cake, however, and paying no further attention to Legrimaudet, who came back to me and said, in a more sarcastic voice than ever as he pointed to the house with a flash of the eye that seemed to me almost dangerous, —

"See to what I have been brought by all that has been written for and against me; I am Monsieur Much-Ado-about-Nothing, tortured for want of money." Then, after a moment's silence holding out his hand with a gesture that was both humble and surly, "Have n't you a bit of silver," he said, "for the little chapel?" As I gave him a franc from my scanty student's purse, he added, thrusting the paltry alms into the

pocket of his knitted waistcoat with inexpressible contempt, "What do you expect I can do with that?" Having given utterance to this singular form of thanks, he pushed open the latticed door, which gave forth a squeaking sound, and disappeared, without looking back, into the damp corridor.

I am quite certain that I have not changed ten words of this conversation, which I wrote down the same evening in my journal of that date. As I thus parted with Monsieur Legrimaudet (can any one, after this, continue to deny that fate has to do with the construction of names?) the feeling came to me that I had just seen in all its naked truth (as I stated at the beginning of my narrative) a unique personality, a specimen of enraged and suffering humanity, such as could by no possibility be compared with any other. Yes, I had looked into the depths of a lost soul, damned by society, — full of anguish, pride, hatred, madness, and at the same time a grotesque and aborted soul. Yet, in this nature that was all ugliness one spot of delicacy lingered, — pity for that poor limping child; and the child, ungrateful too, despised the great despiser! The sole tenderness of this miserable being was rejected. Who shall say that there was not in that last touch of kindness in the gangrened heart the sign of a

possible redemption? One of those divine healers of a troubled conscience, such as we imagine a true priest might be, would have found in that incident a ground of hope. This interview had so powerfully affected me, and the questions it awakened were so closely allied to the philosophical ideas which were then seething in my young mind, that I could not refrain from telling André Mareuil of my discovery of a kindly feeling in the heart of the man who had never said "Thank you." My friend persisted in laughing viciously.

"Nonsense," he said; "you saw wrong, or else Legrimaudet has tapped the washerwoman of a franc or two at some time or other. I do beg of you, don't diminish his merit to my mind. He is a more perfect specimen than you have any idea of. I am delighted to know you had a taste of his quality when your twenty sous were given and received. He reminds me of those metal cases we see at fairs. Slip in a sou and out comes a caramel; with him it is an insult, and even more unfailing."

"Well, consider me a ninny, and let us say no more about it," I replied, not insisting any longer.

I disapproved of Mareuil's chaffing manner; nevertheless it intimidated me. I was at an age when young men blush for their own best instincts. They have a confused impression of

being duped in the game of life if they yield to the naïveté of their first beliefs. It is then that they choose their friends among those whose precocious cynicism is most painful to them; they dare not give free course to the impulses of their heart, the value of which they do not perceive until later in life, when a debilitated and calculating egoism has superseded them. The laws which rule the development of our persons require that we pass through that singular crisis the acute stage of which is marked, about our twenty-second year, by the vaunting of vices. I had not the nerve to tell Mareuil that I was sure, perfectly sure of the sincerity of his wretched parasite in that action of kindly pity to the lame boy. Neither did I dare to add that his own duty was to give the poor man a little real sympathy and not his usual sneering and ironical charity. We stopped speaking of Monsieur Legrimaudet that day; and other days passed, in fact many, without affording us the chance to converse on that or any other topic; for it so happened that I left Paris for several months soon after my long conversation with the cynic of the rue de la Clef. I went for the first time to Italy and Greece. When I returned I found Mareuil launched in the whirlpool of an existence which rendered any intimacy with him almost impossible. He had left the Bibliothèque Nationale, and his early dreams of a literary life

above the trammels of self-interest were transformed into a more practical desire to coin money immediately with his real gift of writing. He had taken a place as parliamentary reporter of an evening newspaper. We met sometimes as everybody meets in Paris, once in three months or so, with a "Good-day," "How are you?" "We really must make an appointment to dine together some of these days." Such remarks are made in good faith, but the time never comes, the appointment is never made; we may live, perhaps, four or five years in the same city as a friend, whom we still love with all our heart, without ever passing a couple of hours with him.

Though I had never met Monsieur Legrimaudet after that famous afternoon, his enigmatical personality still remained in my memory and obsessed me; so much so that whenever I did meet André I never failed to question him about the old author. Neither did my questions ever fail to bring back the old mocking laugh to the lips of my former comrade, — the mere name of his favorite parasite was enough; and each time we spoke of him he told me some characteristic anecdote which exhibited a trait of this singular individual.

"Monsieur Legrimaudet? Oh, yes! as thankless as ever. I have never yet got a grateful word out of him. Last week I was going into the country, and I left an order with my woman

to clothe him from head to foot with a lot of my things, — hat, boots, trousers, jacket, shirts, etc. He wrote to me. I trembled as I opened his letter; was it possible that he would belie himself and thank me for the unexpected gift? No, he gave me a commission to do something for him with the editor of a newspaper, and the sole allusion he made to the clothes was in the signature of the letter: 'Wholly yours, except the socks.' My woman had forgotten to give him any, and he reminded me of the omission with his usual severity."

Or perhaps it was: —

"Monsieur Legrimaudet? As bitter as ever. He came to see me as soon as I got back from England. 'Have n't you a bit of silver for the little chapel?' — you know the formula. I gave him the money. 'Monsieur,' he said, pocketing it, 'your breeding has improved; travelling is good for you. Adieu.'"

Or this: —

"Monsieur Legrimaudet? Just as full as ever of deluded self-conceit. He earned a little money lately by a vile pamphlet on the diseases of free-thinkers, — just the subject for him! What do you suppose he did with the money? That outcast, that homeless vagabond, bought himself a bishop's ring — do you hear me? a bishop's ring with an enormous amethyst. He wears it — you recollect his hands! 'Monsieur,' he said, 'I

have been tracking these rings for years. There are twenty-three among the second-hand dealers in my quarter. This one is much the finest.' "

Or again: —

"Monsieur Legrimaudet? — oh! famishing as ever, with his hungry speeches; you should hear him let fall the sensualities of a poor beggar who has n't had a full meal since his youth. 'It has been a good summer,' he said to me the other day; 'the cholera made fruit cheap. I ate my fill. It is better than meat.' "

Or again: —

"Monsieur Legrimaudet? Well, he 's breaking out. The virtuous castigator of the obscene Diderot has turned lively. He talks of his amours in connection with a certain blue worsted comforter one of his kind neighbors has knit for him. 'The sex admires celebrity,' he said to me with a foppish air; then — in his well-known style — 'When I was young, monsieur, with three sous' worth of coffee, I never found them coy. Monsieur Paul de Kock has drawn me to the life in Gustave.' Then he pulled from his pocket a newspaper article in which was stated the number of soldiers the coming war was likely to cost. 'Good news for men like me,' he added, with a wicked look; 'it will leave us more women,' — winding up with the usual bit of silver for the little chapel and more insults. I tell you, he is absolutely perfect."

My information as to this strange individual stopped short at this point until (about six years after I had first met him) I was sitting at supper with André Mareuil on the 31st of December, 1880. Do I remember the date on account of the incident, or the incident on account of the date? I don't know. By this time I was myself connected with the press, and I wrote the theatrical notices in a journal that has since disappeared. André Mareuil, no longer a parliamentary reporter, was now a critic, and held the same position as mine on a more fashionable newspaper. We were again "accrochés," hooked together, as the saying is, and we fraternized as of old between the acts of a smutty vaudeville or the boisterous scenes of a drama. We agreed to sup together on this particular night in accordance with the ironical custom which turns the end of the year into an occasion for an orgy. Our orgy, however, consisted in a talk, our elbows on the table in the corner of a restaurant, with a dozen oysters and a cold partridge; but it was a long and a gay talk as in the olden time. We were in the midst of this frugal repast and a good deal amused by the comings and goings of the other guests who landed in our nocturnal restaurant. We were observing them out of the corners of our eyes, and André, incorrigible satirist, was characterizing them each with a word, when he

suddenly struck his forehead like a man convicted of unpardonable forgetfulness. He sent the waiter for his overcoat, felt for his portfolio, and from that receptacle he produced a letter, saying : —

" Think of my forgetting to speak of Him ! "

" I 'll bet I know who, by the mere tone of your voice," I cried. " No other than the Sieur Legrimaudet."

" You 've named him," he replied, with a shout of laughter. " Well, I humbly beg your pardon. You were right, and I was wrong ; perfection is not to be found in this world. The old rascal said ' Thank you' to me this very morning—do you hear that ? He said ' Thank you ' — t-h-a-n-k, thank, y-o-u, thank you ! — said it for the first and the last time. To begin with, read that letter ; " and he held out to me a sheet of paper, of the kind used by schoolboys in their classes, on which was written, in letters of enormous size and almost childish shape, the following epistle : —

PARIS, December 23.

Young, handsome and lucky reporter, —

I have heard through a lawyer that you are back from the provinces. I supposed you still away when young Barré-Desminières, one of my Mecænases, told me he had been introduced to you this week. He liked you. Did you like him ? You have the same taste in dress.

All hail to your amazing success! I shall go and see you to-morrow night, New Year's Eve. Shall you make yourself invisible, like your brother journalists? When I, young and then unknown to fame, made my visits of admiration to Chateaubriand, Lamartine, Lacordaire, Berryer, Paul de Kock, Montalembert, I was instantly received and welcomed. But when I wished to see the princes of the press I found them inaccessible, in fact unfindable — for fear of Clichy. Creditors continue to be a terror to these gentry, but nowadays they are more afraid of being sent to prison on complaint of the people they have slandered than for the paltry debts that used to terrify them in the olden time. Ask your dear friend Monsieur d'Altaï if that is not so.

The autumn overcoat bestowed upon me by the model handmaiden (I like that old word) mareuilized me extremely well.* The lawyer I mentioned has been friendly. He gave me two pairs of magnificent shoes. I have stretched them on a form made to the measure of my foot expressly for me by the shoemaker of this street. Saint Crispin protects the triumphant enemy of the impious Diderot. I shall put them on to-morrow when I call to ask you for my little New Year's gift. Silver money will not suffice this time; I shall count on a louis, and this, I think, will probably be my last demand. There is talk of the government giving me a pension, such as will distinguish me from the mob of paltry writers to whom they dole out a hundred or so of francs. This louis is very necessary to me; I need it urgently. I will tell you why when we meet.

Again, all hail! Are you as morose as ever, — you, who have all the good things of life? Real talent is gay; look at me.

JEAN LEGRIMAUDET.

"Well, that is a document indeed," I said, as I gave the letter back. "Why did he want the louis?"

"That's your triumph," returned Mareuil, with a gesture of vexation. "Do you remember telling me of a lame boy, to whom you said Monsieur Legrimaudet had given a cake? You declared that the old wretch had a tender corner in his heart for that child."

"And you made fun of me," I interrupted, laughing.

"I was wrong," continued André, in a tone of discouragement, "quite wrong. I thought Legrimaudet was greater than nature; that was mere romanticism, as our friend Zola says. Life, it seems, is more commonplace. The why and wherefore of that louis was the little lame boy. This morning about ten o'clock Monsieur Legrimaudet arrived and he told me, after getting off a string of his usual impertinences, that the child was ill, very ill, — adding that he, Legrimaudet, wished to surprise him with a Christmas present. He explained to me his interest in the small boy. The mother, a laundress on the lower floor, had done his washing for nothing for

several years. The child was very intelligent, and so lively! he said. It was sad to see him lying in his bed, white as the sheet, with eyes that were dying. In short, my precious Legrimaudet was no longer recognizable in this sudden rush of pity. A diabolical idea came into my head. I must tell you that I played cards at the club last night. Casal was banker, more 's the luck! a wink!—in short, I won over fifty louis on the ace. Legrimaudet did certainly seem to me sincere. Here was a chance to fathom the depths of his ingratitude. I took a hundred-franc note from my purse and gave it to him, saying: 'Come, Monsieur Legrimaudet, let us go shares in the present to your little sick boy. Here 's your louis, and four to boot. Buy him a toy such as he never dreamed of." You can't imagine the face of that old animal when I said this. In his eyes, on his lips, in every dirty wrinkle of the hideous parchment which serves him for a skin, a mighty struggle went on between the rush of pleasure my offer gave him and the bitter hatred he has felt for me for so many years."

"Which you deserve," I interrupted. "Tell the truth; admit that there is something almost fiendish in your sarcastic charity to him."

"Yes, noble soul, there is," replied Mareuil. "At last, — unheard-of, improbable, unbelievable sight! — I saw with my own eyes gratitude get

the better of hatred in that soul which I had fondly believed to be too strong for it. Oh! it was all over in a minute, short but simple. His eyes betrayed an indescribable struggle. His face contorted. His toothless mouth opened, and I heard a 'Thank you' issue from it, rasping his throat; he took my hand — for a second — and then he left me, muttering, 'To the toy shop.'"

"It is you whom I would fain have seen during that interview," I said, laughing in my turn. I was touched that my friend should tell me this tale, and half provoked that he should still affect, even before me, to ridicule his own emotion. For I felt he was moved, even he, by the incident, though he would not have said so for an empire.

"As for me," he replied, "I suppose I looked like the baron in '*On ne badine pas*,' when Blasius tells him that Perdican is skipping stones on the water with the girls in the village. 'Let us shut ourselves up in my study and think of these things,' he says. Monsieur Legrimaudet had no sooner crossed the threshold of the door than I felt I was a fool for believing his fantastic story. The sick child, the louis for a toy, the philanthropic washerwoman! 'Mareuil, my friend, you are a ninny,' I said to myself. Whereupon I seized my coat, and behold me in the street pursuing my Legrimaudet. I was determined to see if he lied to me in pretending to go for the toy. I had no difficulty in getting

within sight of him as he shuffled along at the end of my street. He turned to the left, I turned to the left. He went down the boulevard Hausmann, I did the same behind him. A quarter of an hour later I saw him enter a toy-shop at the corner of the rue de Rivoli — he actually did! I had a moment of pure joy as I noticed the scared look of the shopman when this ragged object asked for a toy worth five louis. The man called the master of the shop, who came himself to speak to Legrimaudet, and then went and fetched his wife. I was quite prepared to enter the shop myself, and protect the poor devil if they accused him of having stolen the blue bank note, which he held in his hand while master, mistress, and clerk gazed at it and at him with insulting suspicion. At last they decided on showing him a box of tin soldiers, — you know, those boxes we once dreamed of, cannons that go off, calvary you can dismount, carriages that open, tents to put up and down. He chose one, they wrapped it up, and out he came, the bundle under his arm, having left the bill, the whole sum, and the master of the shop had given him no change! Which proved indisputably that this half-starved wretch, this blackmailer, this lamentable being had actually paid away his hundred francs, every one of his hundred francs, to carry that ridiculous present to a sick child, — and perhaps that very child will

receive it as you told me he did the cake, without a 'Thank you.'"

"Poor Legrimaudet!" I could not help saying.

"Well, as for me," added Mareuil, with comical indignation, "I've a great mind to have nothing more to do with him; he has deceived me these eight years. I thought I was nourishing a perfect specimen of ingratitude, the true literary monster in all its splendor. I beheld it in marble, in brass, in anything you please, — a solid block; and to think of this rift in it! No, truly, he's spoilt for me."

## II. His Death.

Months and months had passed since this night of the 31st of December when we supped so gayly, André and I, resting from our labors of incompetent dramatic criticism; and if there was any one I felt sure I should never meet again it was that strange and contradictory being, Jean Legrimaudet. For this reason: André, the only person who formed a link between us, was married under rather peculiar circumstances, and had left Paris permanently or very nearly so. He had taken a mistress, a pretty, intelligent girl, named Christine Anroux. They had one child. His paternity so enraptured the sceptic that he married the mother, which was not very sensible. But after all, it was a pleas-

ing generosity which might have done him no harm with the rest of us if Christine had been a suitable wife for a writer, without other ambition than to help her bohemian of a husband to do his best in his profession. Alas! she was just the reverse. Mareuil had not been married three months before we noticed — we who delighted in him for what he was, the light-hearted, high-spirited, *frou-frouant* Parisian, the gay mimic, the humorous dilletante — a strange alteration in his manner of writing. He took to political portraiture, — he, the anonymous author of "L'Art de Rompre," and the teller of that immoral masterpiece, "Le Jupon de Hortense." That feathery pen, hitherto dipped in the lightest of ink, was now employed — on what? in sketching the profiles of apprentice ministers, men who had jumped to power through the folly of electors, and who were maintaining themselves there by low intrigues between the centres and the extreme left. The unfortunate fellow was applying his gift of writing to this miserable purpose, which he could not justify, as in the case of his earlier career, by the want of money. Soon he degenerated still more. He left the staff of the boulevard journal on which he had worked for years, and began a series of "Social Studies" for a pretentious newspaper. More inexplicable still to my mind, he revived, in his signature to these articles (all of a marked radicalism in science

and government), a paltry and rather inelegant title which he had formerly dropped, out of dislike to his father, — Mareuil des Herbiers. I remember that a few days after the first appearance of this rather ridiculous signature at the end of a column of prose, the tendency of which was more deplorable than usual (though the charming style remained, so lively, trenchant, and so truly French!) my poor Claude Larcher was breakfasting with me just before he started for our dear Auvergne, where he died. It was in fact the last time that I ever saw this best friend of my childhood and youth, — the friend, too, of André Mareuil. Naturally enough, we were led to speak of the "Social Studies" and their author.

"What the devil possessed him to use that signature?" I said. "Why trot out those Herbiers whom he used to ridicule so heartily when his father was living? — his 'natural father,' as he called him by way of rejecting him, like Beyle. And just now, too, after making himself the reddest of the reds! Have you seen his defence of religious persecution? To become a red-hot Republican and pick up his title at the same time! why, there's no sense in it."

"Patience," replied Claude. "Christine is behind it all. I don't know exactly what broth that witch is brewing, but this production of the title is only the beginning of things."

"Beginning of what things?" I cried, shrugging my shoulders.

"Why, a secretaryship to an embassy," said Claude, "or master of petitions to the Council of State, treasurer to something or other, perhaps even prefect." Then, as I interrupted him with "Oh, oh!" he gave way to the nervous irritability which seized him at the least opposition in his later days. "Why not?" he demanded. "I think you are very surprising! Would n't he do honor to all those posts? Has n't he more talent in his little finger than all the titled men who fill them put together? — though, upon my word, they do impose upon your mind amazingly."

"I don't question his talent," I said, to stop the tirade. I dreaded the usual assertion of the superiority of the man of letters, which I know but too well; I myself produce it now and then in view of the shameful ignorance and folly of certain specimens of wealth; and what good do I do? — "but how about his behavior?"

"Behavior, indeed! Is n't Christine there to look after him? Do you count her for nothing? 'André!' She has a way of pronouncing those two syllables — cold, cold, icy enough to freeze the mercury in the thermometer which she makes him keep in his study. She is afraid he will overheat himself and get a congestion; she drops in to watch the glass, and takes occasion to

find out with what friend André is dawdling. Would you believe she got him to quarrel with me by telling him I made love to her? She was afraid of me; and much mistaken she was, for I adored their pretty idyl. When Bébé, as she calls him, came, and she used to tickle him to make him gurgle at his papa, can't you fancy me between them, recalling my little suppers with her and Gladys and Casal on the one hand, and on the other my devotions with André, before the altar of a compliant Venus? Ha! it was worth any money to me! But I must needs go and quote to her a saying of Casal's which made me laugh consumedly only the other day. I was breakfasting at his house with Lord Herbert Bohun, and we were in the smoking-room, where Casal showed me photographs of their last trip to the Rocky Mountains. He mistook the album and opened one in which I recognized the portraits of several of his former mistresses. 'Oh, those,' he said, hastily turning the leaves, 'are a lot of women who hate each other.'"

"Do you mean to tell me that you quoted that speech to Madame Mareuil?"

"The truth is," said Claude, ingenuously, "I had really forgotten it concerned her. There is so little of the same woman in her that I no longer remember what she was. However, she paid me off sharply, apropos of my last novel.

'Will you never write a single page in which there is true sentiment,' she said, — 'something which does one good, something to refresh us?' 'I don't do the brunette article,' I replied."

"And Mareuil all this time; what of him?" I asked.

"Des Herbiers? Well, he looked rather sheepish, as you may suppose; and since then he turns his head away when he sees me. When we do bump our noses together, as we did at the tailor's the other day, it is merely 'Good-day,' 'Good-morning.' In short, so far as he and I are concerned, it is a quarrel. No matter now, but when Madame des Herbiers is ambassadress, or treasuress, or mistress of petitions, it will matter a good deal, a good deal!"

I was too accustomed to Claude's exaggerations to attach any importance whatever to his prophecies, which, however, to my utter amazement, I must confess, were actually verified. In the first place, I believed the transformation of the most fantastic being I ever knew into a staid public functionary a thing impossible. Besides, there was Christine Anroux's past life. I was doubly mistaken, however, and Claude was right as to André, and above all as to his wife. The chief strength of women lies in their daring to undertake all things, being convinced, and justly so, of the invincible power of petty means, and

of public forgetfulness. The name and title of des Herbiers were nothing in themselves, but they obliterated a good deal of the compromising literary baggage of Mareuil; moreover, it was a barrier, however slight, against retrospective inquiry. Ah! she counselled him intelligently. To follow the regular road by regular stages was the best way to avoid the ridicule that might fasten on his new nobility, or rather on its tardy revival. As might be expected, a boulevard reporter who did not like Mareuil made fun of the pretension, declaring, with a coarse and savage allusion to poor Christine's past, that André should have signed his articles "Des Herbages." Mareuil sent a challenge to this individual, and was lucky enough to lodge a ball in his side, which all but relieved the press of one of the worst toadies of the fraternity. He profited by the sympathy aroused by this summary punishment of a colleague as much hated as he was feared to publish the register of his own birth, and to prove, documents in hand, his right to the particle, and he finally renounced the name of Mareuil; for the article in which he asked, according to the formula, "to be allowed a few words on a personal matter," was signed, "Des Herbiers" only, and so were all others that succeeded it. After this the tie that bound him to the *doctrinaires* of the Left was strengthened. He offered himself as ministerial candi-

date in the western department from which he came. He failed, but, all the same, he had set foot into politics, and when, seven months later, the "Officiel" gazetted the appointment of Monsieur des Herbiers to a prefecture no one was surprised at the result, which, by the bye, brought forth the last telegram I received from Claude before his death. I copy it here in all its irony, suppressing only the address and retaining the signature, in which was a poor pun on the title of a book which Claude delighted in. "Was I right?" said the missive. "See last administrative action. Reconcile me with prefectess; for whom unbounded admiration. Thy drunken brother." What must the telegraph agent at Saint-Amand-Tallende (Puy-de-Dôme) near Saint-Saturnin, where it is dated, have thought of this despatch! He was right, my dear and absurd friend, for after his death I learned from an authentic source that Monsieur des Herbiers was one of the best prefects, and that Madame des Herbiers had reconciled the usually conflicting relations of the prefecture and bishopric. She had found her vocation, and he had found his. Which proves (by way of parenthesis) that the most ill-chosen marriages do sometimes turn out the wisest. Let me ask you what André would have done if he had not married that pretty little Anroux. Made debts and scandalous articles, the latter paying for the former, and

lived an unhealthy life. Instead of that he renews his youth, grows stouter but not too stout, gets the Legion of honor, and is sceptical, or broad-minded, enough and also eloquent enough to preside with dignity at a "grand rally of republican conservatives" — the formula of his ministry. Only one thing puzzles me: Christine in her gay days did not know how to write; her love-letters were written by an extraordinary person to whom she was much attached, a former pupil at Saint-Denis and afterward the scribe of numberless uneducated cocottes. Had Christine kept her as amanuensis? Was it she who wrote the letters of Madame la préfete to the bishop?

If I have made this rather strange digression into the career of the present prefect of — (look into the Register) it has not been, as I trust my readers will believe, for the mere pleasure of ridiculing an old friend who has fallen from bohemianism into honors and distinction. Neither do I intend to criticise the personal appointments of this, our third republic. As things have turned out, the choice of the ministry has been justified. I have simply given way, pen in hand, to my recollections, when I really intended only to explain why I no longer expected to meet the old parasite of my former friend. For of course Mareuil's new career removed him from our usual opportunities of

meeting, and neither of us sought to make any other; in which, I must say, we were very wise. The renewal of intercourse between early comrades who have grown totally dissimilar by the action of life is only a source of suffering. While André had anchored his boat in a tranquil official haven I was endeavoring to steer mine through the tossing waves of that dangerous literary ocean which justifies my worn-out metaphor by its inconstancy and its demand for daily effort. To speak prosaically, I had continued to write volume after volume, to produce articles that were more or less hostile to received opinions, to verify in my own person the old remarks of moralists on the bitter hatreds excited by even slight success, and to resign myself or become depressed according to the mood in which they found me. But after all, the lot of a man who exercises a profession which conforms to the desires of his earliest youth is a happy one compared to that of others in this world of trial. It has its dark hours, — when, for instance, we are insulted and abused by some brother of the craft, whom we have ever treated with gracious courtesy. But it has also many charming hours, even delightful ones, when some warm effusion of fresh young sympathy comes to us; and it was through one of these that I came once more upon the traces of the enigmatical Legrimaudet. The occasion was very nearly too

late for that result, but it was written above that the face of that lost soul of literature, outlined rather than pictured upon my memory by the two interviews I have related and by André's confidences, should be cut into my mind with ineffaceable characters before it disappeared forever.

I received last year, in the month of December, one of those letters from unknown persons which flatter, irresistibly, an author's self-love, even after long experience has proved to him that such missives serve as a prologue to other missives much less disinterested. This particular letter, signed "Juste Dolomieu," merely asked me to be kind enough to read a voluminous manuscript bearing the rather juvenile title of "The Death of the Century." I opened its pages with distrust, but I closed them with a curiosity that was almost an emotion. The book was a novel, in which the author had tried to embody in three or four personages the conflicting tendencies of the age: socialism and dilettanteism, the cosmopolitan spirit and the analytical spirit, pessimistic discouragement and the revival of mysticism. This mere indication of its character will relieve me of the necessity of adding that the book was lacking in certain qualities, indispensable, after all, to the art of novel-writing, which must not be reduced to dissertation. However, though the dramatic element was absent in this rather incoherent work,

absent too the red blood of life, eloquence abounded, and so did intellectual passion and thought. The young author of these pages would doubtless never become a novelist, but he would as undoubtedly be a writer of note. Still less did I doubt it when I saw the youth himself, for he seized my sympathetic interest at once by one of the most captivating personalities of a youthful great artist that I have ever met. Thin and almost fragile, this lad, who might perhaps be twenty-three, had a way of bending his head forward which betrayed long hours of labor at a writing-table, just as his pallid cheeks gave signs of insufficient nourishment, and his clean but threadbare garments of poverty and thrift. His white teeth, shown by his naïve smile, and the glorious lustre of his blue eyes proved, on the other hand, that the vital forces were untouched. His hair, worn long, was fine as a woman's, and through the humble sleeves of his woollen shirt came a pair of handsome and well-kept hands. When he spoke ideas seemed to flash from his forehead, and his voice, which was rather low, had a charm analogous to that of his glance and of his writing, the nervous elegance of which I had greatly admired. In short, to employ a term now hackneyed by ill-usage, but which alone expresses an indefinable form of charm, if any face ever deserved to be called *interesting* it was his, and my first interview with him made

me quickly aware that a choice soul was hidden behind that delicate personality. After discussing without presumption and without flattery, the criticisms I had written to him upon his novel, he ended what he had to say with the grace of a proud modesty which simply charmed me, the tone was so different from that of the young gentlemen who aspire to literature in the present day. Moreover, I had lately received so painful an impression of the ravages which the ferocity (if I may so call it) of precocious ambition can produce in the heart of a young man of twenty-five (see "A Saint") that to meet a true aspirant of the literary life did me good. He concluded by saying: —

"After all, the book is only a study. It is the second I have written, and I shall wait for the eighth or ninth before I print, — if I am then satisfied, or rather, less dissatisfied. Do you think I am right?"

"To tell you the truth," I replied, "it is not easy to give a definite opinion on that point. Some men of genius have been trained by contact with the public, like Hugo and Balzac. Others have been immediately incapacitated by the same contact. Besides, there is a primary consideration, which seems as if it ought to be quite secondary in such matters, but which controls, and always has controlled, the destiny of a man of letters. You will readily understand

that I mean money. Let me ask you an indiscreet question. What business do you follow outside of your literary work?"

The young man's clothes betrayed, as I have said, a decent poverty, which seemed to authorize my question; I was therefore not a little surprised when he answered: —

"None. My living is secured for five years."

"I understand," I said; "your family are making you an allowance for that time?"

"Alas!" he replied, very sadly. "I have no family. I lost my father three years ago, and my mother last year."

"Pardon me," I replied, "for having touched those memories. But," I persisted, "it was the natural interpretation of your remark as to your life being secured for five years."

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "had my poor father lived it would not have been for five years; my whole life would have been secured to me. We did not live in Paris, monsieur, as you have doubtless perceived." He certainly had a sort of awkwardness in his movements which might have been thought provincial, but could also be explained by the timidity of youth. "I was educated," he continued, "at the school of Amiens. My father was notary at Beaucamps-le-Vieux, a small market-town, near Aumale and Tréport. If you ask why the idea occurred to me to become a literary man, I cannot answer

you. I only know that from my eleventh or twelfth year I have always had it. Monsieur, my father was so kind, so intelligent. He never opposed my choice; he only asked that I should live in the country under his roof, that was his one condition. He was a man of much education, of high culture. He had reflected much, and he believed in local literature. By his advice I planned a series of novels in which I should have applied the same system which Monsieur Zola employs for his picture of divers social classes to the history of my own neighborhood. I should have followed a Gallic-Roman family through the ages. Before me were new and unused types and surroundings, or I should rather say revived surroundings, for science enables us in these days to re-construct the Middle Ages and the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, — to mention only three periods,— as our forefathers were unable to do. What amplitude in the frame we now possess, which allows of a book on the Crusades, on the hundred years' war, the invasion of Italy, the wars of the Revolution, and those of the Empire! Why, it is a field of labor in which one may represent, layer upon layer, the formation of the soul of our northern France. Don't think me vain for speaking thus. In revealing to you this project, which was first suggested to me by my father, I wished to show you what a counsellor I have lost in losing him. It was an ordinary

tragedy, but heart-breaking. The absconding of a banker in Aumale and the financial ruin which came of it to the whole neighborhood forced my poor father to sell his practice hastily. It would take me too long to tell you how he indorsed for others out of pure kindness. We were ruined. He died of grief, and my mother soon followed him. I lost the long period of easy leisure required for the execution of the vast plan my father and I had discussed. Besides, life at Beaucamps had become too painful to me. I converted into money the little property I was able to rescue from the wreck of what had once been a comfortable provincial fortune, and I resolved to go to Paris. I had before my mind the example of Balzac's D'Arthez, and of Balzac himself. I gave myself five years to learn my profession as a novel-writer, and to produce a work which should open the *feuilleton* columns to me, and so enable me to live by my pen. My calculation was a very simple one: these *feuilletons* must be made to pay; it is impossible therefore the editors of newspapers should not accept careful work in preference to the novels they now publish, which are not carefully written. On the other hand, if there is really any thing in me it will come out, and I shall do true work, together with this work for money, — like our masters."

This little speech was made in a tone so ener-

getic and yet tranquil that it pleased me hugely. The project he had developed of a series of novels on the history of his province might have given him the opportunity for a display of pretension. On the contrary, the charm of his ingenuous nature made itself felt. The image of this father passionately interested in the literary future of his son and striving to guide his vocation instead of opposing it touched me deeply. The reverence the son felt for that dear memory moved me not less. I saw reason to estimate the moral character of this young man as highly as I already did his precocious gift of writing, and his courageous acceptance of his temporary toil. But would his courage survive a practical knowledge of the difficulties against which he was sure to strike? Thus thinking, and having complimented the wisdom of his scheme, I said to him: —

"Will you allow me, as elder brother of the craft, to push my indiscretion still further? You say you have just come to Paris?"

"I have been here five months."

"Well, how much have those five months cost you?"

"Five hundred francs," he replied, simply.

"Five hundred francs! oh, impossible!" I cried.

"It is true, though," he said with a laugh of almost juvenile gayety. "I pay fifteen francs a

month for my room, and three francs for attendance. I get my dinner by the plateful in a little creamery frequented by workmen, where the meal costs only twenty sous. I take my breakfast at home with a little something from a cook-shop, bread, cheese, and a cup of coffee which I make myself; the whole does n't cost me fifteen sous. I have linen and clothes enough to last several years. In the evenings I work at the Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, and I get up at daylight. In this way I save lights. As for the cold, I have a little foot-warmer, such as the peasant-women use in my province. My budget is fixed at the sum of one hundred and twenty francs a month, one thousand and five hundred francs a year, for five years. At this moment I am within it by over a hundred francs."

"But suppose the value of some of your little property diminishes; or suppose it were stolen? Where have you deposited it?"

"Nowhere," he replied, with a knowing look. "I had my poor father's experience for a warning. Before leaving Beaucamps I got the wheelwright of the village to make me a leather belt such as travellers wore in the olden time, with a number of little pockets all round it. I put my money into that and I wear it next my skin under my clothes."

"How did you manage to secure a room for fifteen francs in the rue Princesse, so near the

faubourg Saint-Germain?" That was the address he had written on the outer sheet of his manuscript. This street, which runs parallel with the rue Bonaparte, opens into that nest of old houses clustering between Saint-Sulpice and Saint-Germain-des-Prés. I happened to know it because my bookbinder lived there. Narrow as it was, and little worthy of its royal name, it did not seem, as I recollected it, to be so low in the scale as to furnish lodgings at that meagre price. Juste Dolomieu's face again wore its happy smile of triumph.

"Ah!" he cried, "it was not so easy, I admit. I wished to live in the Latin quarter so as to be near the two libraries, the Sorbonne and Sainte-Geneviève. I could find nothing. Furnished lodgings are unattainable for me now because the institution of scholarships has increased the number of students who are able to pay forty or fifty francs a month without feeling it. For thirty francs you can get nothing better than a corner under the roof; now my Thebaïd, on the contrary, is comparatively spacious, though rather high up. But there I have a fine view of the old abbey of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and I can repeat every evening the lines of Baudelaire:—

'Beside the bells I listen, dreaming,
To solemn hymns the breeze conveys.'

The little room has already brought me luck; for it was there I wrote the novel which you have read, — three hundred pages in five months. That 's something. Besides, these fourth-rate hôtels in Paris are full of mysteries, and now that I have done the work I laid out to accomplish by the end of the year, I have time for observation. Every day I meet elegant women passing up and down the staircase, who are keeping some rendezvous. Moreover I have a neighbor, an old man who is a great puzzle to me. Imagine a character out of Dickens, — a small, old man, very white, and always wearing a dress coat. He used to talk with me, but since he found out that I am busy with literature he avoids me. He is afraid I 'll put him in some book, poor old fellow. I need n't tell you that if I do utilize him I shall take good care to conceal his identity. Yes, poor soul, he is poor indeed! But he must have seen better days, and belonged to some family who were comfortably off, for he possesses jewels which must have come to him by inheritance. No later than last week I heard voices disputing on our landing. I opened my door and found he was urging the waiter to give him back a little article. It was a bishop's ring with an enormous amethyst. The waiter had taken it from the old man, and he replied insolently: 'Pay me the ten francs you have owed me for the last month, or I 'll take it to the pawn-

brokers and get my money.' The old man retorted: 'Give back that ring. You know very well I have not received the money I expected. I shall have it in another week; give back the ring!' 'Ten francs, or no ring!' cried the other who has an evil face, like that of a bloated Hercules. If you had only seen the despair of Monsieur Jean, — that's my neighbor's name, — the sort of agonized wrath which contracted all the features of his miserable face, you would have done as I did."

"You paid the waiter his ten francs and returned the ring to the poor devil?"

"Of course I did," he replied.

"And Monsieur Jean insulted you in this tone — " I continued, imitating as best I could the inimitable voice of my old friend Legrimaudet, whom I had instantly recognized by three infallible signs: his everlasting dress-coat, the incognito of his Christian name, and the bishop's ring, bought in memory of his early ecclesiastical days out of his starvation savings.

"Surely, you know him!" exclaimed Juste Dolomieu. "It is quite true that when I said, 'You can return the money when convenient,' he replied: 'Monsieur, in a house of this kind it is very easy to earn money if you are young. That waiter has plenty; and so, no doubt, have you. Ladies are not scarce.' I did not comprehend until after he had gone that he sus-

pected me of receiving money from some of those fine ladies who often come here."

"That is he!" I cried, "he himself! I recognize the Master's manner. Small eyes of different colors, are they not? a hideous mouth, bitterness itself? The right leg drags as he walks and he has an enormous bunion on his left foot? Hair, greenish gray, such as you see in very old portraits?" Then, as Juste replied to each of my questions with an affirmative gesture, I added: "There's not a doubt of it! He is no other than Monsieur Jean Legrimaudet."

When I uttered, with intentional emphasis, a name so celebrated in the annals of defamatory literature I could see on the transparent face of my young visitor an indignant disgust, which the tale of the hundred-franc toy given to a sick child was powerless to lessen. I envied him his indignation. I, too, had felt it on the occasion of my first encounter with the base lampooner. Good heavens! I was far enough from feeling it now! — another aspect of that truth so eloquently, and so sadly formulated by the ancient philosopher: "We die degraded by life, which allows us to retain none of the noble sentiments which can alone render it worth living." Why live it, then? Twenty years of Parisian existence deprives a man of letters of all sources of surprise save one, — that of not encountering the worst rancors of jealous hatred in the com-

panions of our youth who have remained behind the age; nor the calumny of those we serve; nor the ferocious jealousy of our juniors, nor a like jealousy in our dearest masters when the ups and downs of fashion bring us into competition with them. Ah, that hideous passion of jealousy! that disease, common to all, but seemingly the special attribute of the genus artist, — so fruitful a soil does it find in hearts that are emulous of fame, — how can we preserve a rightful indignation against it after we have once discovered that its existence is a thing unknown to itself? The saddest of all sad things, that. It is a very rare thing that a jealous man is conscious of his vice. On the contrary, he attributes honorable motives to the furious antipathy he feels toward the object of his fatal passion. The victim of this vice has no difficulty, however, in discovering all abject human weaknesses in those he envies. He swells their total with the anger that consumes him. He sees nothing but those weaknesses; and so it comes to pass that he mistakes the sincerity of his hatreds for conviction, his brutality for frankness, and his calumnies for a bounden duty. I am not sure but what a Legrimaudet imagines he does the work of an honest man in pursuing with the bitterest bile a famous writer. I endeavored to explain these causes for compassion to the uncompromising young

mind of my visitor. But he was at the age of all noble revolts, while I, alas, had passed it.

After he left me I was unable to go back to the work he had interrupted. Again I was forcibly struck by the strange meetings of chance and the delight that mysterious power seems to take in bringing the poles together. Did it intend by this meeting of Juste Dolomieu and Jean Legrimaudet on the same landing of a dingy hotel to symbolize to my eyes the two extremes of literary life, — the artist at the dawn of his talent and his life, on the one hand; on the other, the victim of the pen at his last stage in the fatal overthrow of all his hopes. The youth, so proud and confident to-day, would he, too, end like this old man? Had the old man, at twenty-two, when he left his native Dijon for Paris and wrote the "History of Great Men," had he the emotions of this young novel-writer? "It is indeed a pity," I said to myself, "that Mareuil is no longer Mareuil. What *meditations* we could have had together." This was André's favorite word employed to ridicule Claude Larcher at the time he was writing his "Physiology of Love," a naïve reproduction of Brillat and Balzac. I imagined to myself the sarcasms that scoffer would have indulged in; and then I wondered, with a renewal of curiosity, through what vicissitudes the Great Thankless had been led to desert his haven in the rue de la Clef.

To such poor wretches with the wolf at their door, who live from hand to mouth on a fluctuating charity, the question of lodging is cruelly important. A corner where they are known, where they can, on a pinch, get credit for a week or a month, — why, that is safety, or indeed salvation, to most of them, especially in the cold winter months, the cruel severity of which we little imagine as we sit from October to May beside the logs in our fireplaces, with leisure to play with the embers at the will of our dreams. A Legrimaudet, in Paris, is like an animal in a wood. He clings to his burrow, the hole or lair in which he crouches of a cold night or when death threatens him, — that awful death at the angle of a quay or on the bench of a lonely boulevard. Besides, I said to myself, that real affection, the only affection of his bitter and suffering heart, would have kept him in the house before which I had seen him playing with the little lame boy. The child must have died, as Legrimaudet seemed to fear he might in his conversation with André on New Year's Eve, — that New Year's Eve, now so distant, which we had celebrated, my friend and I, with a gayety and light-heartedness now gone forever. All these questions presented themselves to my mind pell-mell, and the upshot was that about a week after my talk with Juste Dolomieu I paid a visit to the rue Princesse which still makes me shudder when-

ever I think of it. But the sketch which I have here drawn of a lost soul of literature would be incomplete without an account of this subsequent meeting and the events which followed it.

I found the little street, as narrow, poverty-stricken and busy as I remembered it, — with its humble shops and its haggard population, its pallid children, its ill-fed workwomen; in short, as much as ever a miserable slum of the old Paris. I had no difficulty in discovering the house which had the honor of harboring at this particular time two notable specimens of the literary profession. It was the only hotel in the street, and quite in keeping with what I had imagined it to be from Juste Dolomieu's description, except that it bore no other sign than the name of the proprietor painted on a lantern hanging above the door: "Furnished Rooms, Isidore Cordabœuf, proprietor." The building must have been very old, for it had sunk on one side, — so much so that the words "Furnished Rooms," freshly painted in black letters, showed the line of settlement. The door, which was grated in the style of the hotel de Saint-Flour, was partly open. I pushed it and found myself in a corridor, on the wall of which I read the words, "Office on the first floor." The staircase was covered with a carpet now so worn, faded, and pieced that it was im-

possible even to imagine its original color. In spite of the suspiciously sordid aspect of the entrance, I was not prepared for the spectacle presented to me in the office, where two women were playing Chinese bezique among a number of beer glasses on a table which was still covered with the remains of a meal, though the hands of a time-piece on the mantel were at three o'clock. "Eighty patrons," said the stouter of the two women, throwing down four kings, the colors of which were concealed by grease. She showed a bosom worthy of one of Rubens' nereids, which shook and oscillated at every movement beneath a sort of dressing-gown made of blue flannel, — all the while smoking an ill-made cigarette between lips that were outrageously painted. A layer of rouge was caked upon her cheeks, the eyebrows were blackened with a chalk pencil, the bandeaux of her dark hair shone with pomatum, while the hands which held the cards were adorned with trumpery rings in such numbers that nearly every finger was covered to the first joint. As for her partner, she wore a dinner-dress, very light in color and very much furbelowed, which I judged, from a mere inspection of the sleeves which were braided to the shoulder and fantastically puffed, had been worn about the streets; a white felt hat, adorned in the same taste with enormous feathers, reposed on the sideboard among the bottles. This

one was fair-haired, with a complexion drained of blood, — the faded, washed-out, ghastly complexion of a creature who has gone through innumerable revels. She too was smoking; driving the smoke through her thin nostrils, which contracted nervously. Her blue eyes glittered with a cold, false light. She stared at me rudely with her impassible face, where each feature was sharply defined as if marked by the point of a knife. Her companion, on the contrary, assumed a honeyed smile on her painted lips as she greeted me; replying in her softest voice to my question, "Is Monsieur Dolomieu at home?" "Number 47? No, monsieur, his key is on the nail. He is out. But if you like to wait, he won't be long."

The obsequiousness of this questionable matron, the fantastic apparel and crapulous face of her companion, at once enlightened me as to the class of inns to which the house belonged. To tell the truth, I had suspected as much when Dolomieu mentioned the ladies he met on the stairs, and especially when he repeated Legrimaudet's sneer about handsome young men and their resources. But neither then nor even now when I saw the house did I suspect the particular speculation of the Sieur Cordabœuf, or the official business of that man with the truculent name. I was not to remain long in this state of ignorance, as will now be seen.

"I have not time to wait," I replied to the fat woman. "But if Monsieur Jean is at home I will go up and see him."

"Ah! do you know Monsieur Jean?" said the woman, eagerly. "What a pity Monsieur is not at home to speak to you. We are rather uneasy about Monsieur Jean, and if we only knew the address of his family —"

"I don't know it myself," I said. "Is he ill?"

"If he goes out of this house any way but feet foremost he'll be lucky," said the other woman. Heavens, what a voice! coming hoarsely from that emaciated breast, evidently destroyed by alcohol, — the fitting herald of a Legrimaudet's death. My heart ached as I asked: —

"What is the matter with him?"

"Misery and starvation," said the girl, in her terrible voice, as she blew a puff of smoke from her cigarette and shrugged her shoulders, while the other remarked in her insinuating way: —

"You can easily understand, monsieur, that if any misfortune happened —"

"But what does the doctor say?" I exclaimed, interrupting her.

"The doctor!" she replied. "Oh! bless me! he won't let even the waiter go into his room more than once a day. Such a smell in there for a week past! — ever since he has been in this state. If I were Monsieur I'd send him to the hospital, sharp."

"Old Cordabœuf is wickeder than you, said the girl. "Don't you know that types like Jean often have thousand-franc notes sewn into the lining of their coats all the while they are letting themselves die of hunger? The master has an eye to the hoard when the old one is snuffed out, you may be sure."

"You have no right to talk so, Rosette," replied the elder woman. "If it were Madame, now, that might be. But Monsieur — it 's a word and a blow with him, I know, but he is good-hearted. The proof is that Monsieur Jean owes him four months, and he does not dun him for it."

"I shall go up," I remarked. "If he does not let me in I can come down again, that 's all. What is his number?"

"49; next to Monsieur Dolomieu, fourth story, to the right."

Then, without further attention to me, she began to arrange the cards spread out before her, and I heard the monotonous "Eighty monarchs," as I made my way up the staircase over the filthy carpet. Two or three doors opened as I passed, disclosing the faces of other women as painted and bedizened as that of the manager below, — a minor detail which continued to enlighten me as to the morals of this den. It needed the innocence and literary somnambulism of Juste Dolomieu not to have perceived that

this so-called hotel was simply one of those questionable houses which only need a metal number to go by a blunter name. And it was here, in this lair of clandestine prostitution, that a young man was nurturing his earliest dreams of art, here that, Monsieur Legrimaudet was about to die, denying God, as he had foretold to me in former days! True, the miserable creature had followed a base career as parasite and slanderer; but to die here, under such conditions, was indeed too much. I don't know why a passage from Michelet came into my mind as I passed up the dingy staircase (dingy in spite of the cloudless sky without), — except that I have always loved the strange, deep pity of it. The historian has just related the Ninth Thermidor and the fall of the sanguinary pedant in whom was manifested in its highest degree the imbecile atrocity of the Terror. Suddenly he breaks forth: "Robespierre drank gall, to the dregs of all the world contained of it." We may hate the murderer of André Chénier and of so many others, but when we think of him in that hour when the populace insulted him, as it formerly acclaimed him, with the basest cowardice; when his infamous courtiers abandoned him; when he suffered in the flesh with that broken jaw, in his pride as he felt himself vanquished and forever, in his mind when he saw the absurd scaffolding of his political ideas

crumbling to atoms — yes, when we think of him stretched on that table amid those taunts, overtaken by such ruin, pity comes, and we say with Michelet, "he was made to drink all the gall this world contains." How then shall we feel when the matter concerns, not one of the worst tyrants in history, but a poor devil of a parasite, besotted with self-conceit and guilty of certain slanderous lampoons, forgotten as soon as printed, — the fate by the bye, of all books on personalities. Fate had filled his cup, even his! with gall indeed. Thinking thus, I reached the fourth story, where the carpet came to a sudden end, leaving bare the dingy and disjointed floor, which had not been oiled for many a year. The corridor on which the chambers opened turned round upon itself, for the house, with its two wings thrown back, inclosed a court. A court? no, — a pit of dampness and foul smells, which I perceived through the windows, void of glass. The proprietor had evidently renounced the hope of making money out of these attic rooms, and had therefore relegated to their discomforts his own servants and his more luckless tenants, such as my young friend Dolomieu and Legrimaudet, to both of whom their extremely low rent made even those discomforts acceptable. I looked at the numbers, 42, 43, 45 — there is the room of the guileless emulator of D'Arthez; 49, here the lair of the old monster.

I knocked. No answer. I knocked again, two sharp raps which would have roused the soundest sleeper. Same silence. Two more raps. At last I heard a voice, which I recognized, groaning rather than shouting an angry "Who's there?" The eager desire I had to see the man suggested the reply which was most likely to force that locked door.

"A friend of Monsieur André Mareuil," I said, dwelling on the name, which I repeated, "Monsieur Mareuil."

"Wait a moment," said the voice after a moment's pause; "I will open the door."

No doubt Legrimaudet deliberated with himself as to whether or not he should admit the friend of his former protector. Then he decided to depart from his usual habits. "Apparently," thought I, "because he hopes for some assistance in money or care." I was mistaken; I firmly believe now that he was actuated, even in this hour of his greatest distress, by the desire, the almost physical need of insulting André once more in the person of his friend. He hated him so intensely. Nothing was changed in that soul, as tenaciously powerful, in its way, as that of hero or martyr. I was soon convinced of this by the look he gave me after he had drawn the bolt of the door and I stood before him. He was in his shirt, if that name can be given the dirty rag of tattered

flannel which hung upon his body. How shrunken that body was, the miserable naked legs tottering with fever told but too well. No early Christian painter infatuated with mysticism ever gave to his Christs such emaciated limbs, so fleshless and devoid of muscle. The hair, now white, hung in disorder about the face, which was more wrinkled than it used to be, more like a bit of parchment, but still as terrific as ever with its red blotches. Upon it I read Death in the strange decomposition of each haggard feature. He looked at me with a sort of peevish astonishment, for which I was prepared; and without giving him time to reflect I pushed him toward the bed.

"Come," I said, "you will take cold; lie down again."

He obeyed me, with groans which plainly told of his sufferings, as he clambered back upon the miserable pallet, on which he had piled all his clothes, — a mound of rags; at the top of them the coat, the celebrated coat, displayed its antiquated shape and its threadbare texture, more arachnean than ever. Could it be the same habiliment, preserved to him by some miracle of the goddess Poverty? or did Legrimaudet think it due to his dignity to barter the many garments his Mecænases bestowed upon him for an unfailing dress-coat? This secret he has carried to his grave, together with that other

secret as to where the articles which furnished this lair of his came from, and what was their history. His trunk, in the first place, the one in which he kept all the criticisms published for and against him about his "Diderot," where did he get that? What were his reasons for keeping on his bureau that bunch of rusty keys, that plaster bust of Homer, an empty case for knives (which was always open) and the band-box for his hat? Cigar-ends picked up in the street were piled upon a cracked plate. The cast of his misshapen and clumsy foot, made by a charitable shoemaker, stood on one end of the bureau, together with two loaves of bread, of which nothing remained but the crust, the crumb having been scraped out by dirty finger-nails. Empty bottles, boxes of sardines also empty, books, pipes, etc., were tossed here and there; and among this rubbish I saw, laid flat upon the bureau, a child's crutch! This relic of the little lame boy, the sole being the old lampooner had ever loved, touched me more than I can tell and disposed me to receive indulgently the splash of sepia which the sick man was certain to squirt at me. His sharp eye pierced me from the depths of his bed. He was trying to recall my features through the years that were past. This absorbed contemplation left me time to complete my inventory of the room and its furniture, which latter consisted of a writing-

table covered with papers, a carpet more rotten than that on the stairs, three chairs, and a table beside the bed with a broken-nosed water-pitcher and a wineglass. No chimney. A round hole made in an upper pane of the window, and now closed with oiled paper, proved the presence of a stove in the more sumptuous days of Legrimaudet's predecessor. Suddenly I saw by his lip that he recognized me; which did not surprise me. Beggars, who are obliged to scrutinize the features of their contributors with an acuteness on which their very subsistence depends, have an amazing memory for faces, equal to that found at the other extremity of the social universe, — among princes, whose business it is to cultivate it. This recognition enabled him to kill two birds with one stone, as the saying is, and to associate me with the insult he was preparing to launch at André.

"Well, well," he began, "so you are the poet [he said "poâte," as usual]. Do you still write verses? Did you compose an epithalamium on the marriage of Monsieur Mareuil des Herbiers? I am told, monsieur, that his wife could formerly be had for five francs. I have taken to myself a new motto: no money, no illusions. Well, it's a pity. There was some good in him, too. Why has n't he been to inquire after me? Probably his wife would n't let him; such creatures are afraid of a keen observer, — they

prefer simpletons. I suppose you stand well with her?"

A racking cough interrupted this speech, in which I recognized, despite the quavering of the feeble voice, that spontaneity of almost genial insult which André admired so much. Ah, he was still the Great Thankless of France, who could not lay down his arms even on his deathbed! I understood at last, and I may say for the first time, the diabolical fascination he had for my friend. How could I answer, except, as I did, with a commonplace remark.

"Mareuil is not in Paris," I said; "he is at his prefecture, if not — "

"He resides there, does he?" interrupted the sick man, "that's surprising in a man who liked to travel. Travel was good for him. It used to form him a little. He came back from England quite improved, I remember. I told him at the time — " Here another fit of coughing came on, and then those arrogant lips began again: "If you have not come from him, monsieur le poâte, I would like to know who has sent you? Some editor, perhaps. I warn you I shall be stiff in my conditions. They have kept me waiting too long — "

So his old illusions were as vivid as ever! Should I laugh or weep at his crazy self-conceit. After all, he had lived by it. As I think of him now it seems to me that those words, said in

that place and at that moment, were the most significant he ever uttered. It was in good faith that he spoke and thought of his own genius and its ultimate triumph. He awaited that triumph with the certainty with which an astronomer awaits the comet his calculations have predicted.

It was necessary, however, to explain my presence, were it only to prevent an anger which might have been fatal to him. I decided to tell him the simple truth.

"No one has sent me," I said; "a mere accident brought me. I received a visit from your young neighbor, Monsieur Juste Dolomieu. I came to return it, and hearing you were ill I inquired for you —"

"Ah!" he moaned, in a tone of wounded vanity, which told me how imprudent I had been. "So that man informed you that I was his neighbor? He has ferreted out my name. I 'll give him a lesson; I 'll teach him to mind his own business, instead of going about telling where I live. He is not much of a man himself, or he would n't live here. As for me, monsieur, if I do lodge in this place it is because I am reduced to it by envy. But he, at his age, and when he might earn money by work, he must be lost indeed to stay in a house like this and be kept by it."

"I think myself," I replied, "that the air seems bad."

"The air bad, monsieur!" he exclaimed. "Why, has n't your friend told you that it is an annex to a house of ill-fame in the rue des Canettes, close by? Yes, monsieur, the master of that house had the productive idea five years ago of taking this hotel for his boarders who are out at night. You know there are some men to whom it is repugnant to go into that other kind of house, and the girls tell them of a little hotel they know, very quiet, kept by worthy people. The fools pay for it. Ten francs, monsieur! And who gets the money, do you suppose? Cordabœuf. Then there 's five francs for the room, ten or fifteen more for what 's consumed, — champagne, cigarettes, a little supper. And who gets that money? Always Cordabœuf. Ah, monsieur, if you only knew what it is to bear the name of Legrimaudet and to be in debt to such a blackguard. The women are worth a dozen of him. There is always one who will get a package of tobacco from a lover and give it to me. And once, monsieur, one freezing night when I was very cold, one of them, after her man had left her early, came and fetched me and took me into her own bed because there was a fire in her room. She was very tired, monsieur. We were very virtuous. But oh! I slept well that night, comforted by the warmth of that young body. Apropos, monsieur, why are the women of these days so

indifferent that they refuse to let us kiss their lips?"

"But tell me," I said, overcome by this awful revelation of so piteous a charity, "how did you ever come to live in this dreadful place?"

"I am thirsty," he said; "will you give me the water-pitcher." Then, after I had filled him a glass and he had emptied it, "Monsieur," he said, "it is easy to see that you have never known poverty. There can be no talent without knowing it; remember that I told you so. But in my case the trial has lasted too long. It was the waiter at the hôtel de Saint-Flour who decided me to come here. Twelve francs instead of fifteen, — it was a great saving. And then my washerwoman went away because her boy died, — such an intelligent child, monsieur. I hoped to educate him. Ah! he would have revenged me on my enemies. Don't let us speak of it, — in short, I moved here. At first things went pretty well, for the waiter told me the histories of the women. Monsieur, a senator comes here every Saturday, with a false beard; and a journalist, one of those who attacked my books. I have seen him here. I am preparing a note about him to the preface of the new edition of my 'Hugo.' Yes, I am only waiting till I get well to do battle once more. Lately, my good waiter has been sent away, and they have got another in his place who detests

me. Between ourselves, I think the journalist recognized my face and that he is paying these people to get rid of me by ill-treatment. Monsieur, I will never yield to such proceedings — Ah!" he added, striking his breast with a trembling hand, on which I saw the gleaming amethyst of the bishop's ring, "how I burn here! drink, give me more drink!"

"But," I said, "if you continue to drink this cold water it will do you harm. Let me send you some milk."

"I have more than I need," he answered; "one of the women brings it up to me every evening since I have been ill, at five o'clock."

"Then let me send you some bedding."

"No, monsieur, I am suffocating with heat as it is."

"But, at least," I persisted, "you won't refuse a bit of silver for the little chapel?"

"I have money," he replied with rising anger. "That drawer is full of it. My publishers paid me in advance for the new edition of 'Hugo' the very day before I caught this cold." He coughed again as though his very soul would be coughed up. "He owed it to me," continued the sick man, "in view of the preceding edition which he fairly stole from me."

"Then," said I, "I shall send you my own physician to-morrow, to put an end to this ailment of yours."

"A physician!" he sneered. "No, monsieur, I will not see one. They are all humbugs. If I wished for a physician, let me tell you that Mademoiselle Gransart would send me hers; in fact, if I were willing, she would be here now to nurse me. This Sunday is the first for twenty-five years that I have not gone to breakfast with her at Passy. Her father appreciated me, monsieur. He was a man of taste, though something of a pedant. He was superintendent at the Louvre, and was very useful to me in preparing my 'Diderot.' He could n't write, but he was a capital library rat for all that. He died three months ago, at the age of eighty, from a fall he had in getting out of an omnibus. I said to him. 'You indulge yourself too much, Monsieur Gransart; you should take exercise; walk as I do.' However, he was an old egoist; he preferred to spend his money in riding about, instead of economizing for his daughter, whom he might have left richer than he did. She deserved it, monsieur, for she 's a saint. I can say this, for I 've known her, as I told you, for the last twenty-five years. You can readily imagine I have never told her my address. I don't choose that she should ever come and see me here. She must have expected me last Sunday, and been uneasy at my absence. I am her best friend. I went to see her every day for a time, after her father died. She has always

welcomed me with angelic kindness. Women can understand a great talent under misfortune. They are less jealous than men."

Though the last little touch was altogether *Legrimaudesque*, as André used to say, the rest of his remarks about Mademoiselle Gransart betrayed such unusual feelings in his unfortunate soul that this alone gave me an extreme desire to know the old maid. The age at which her father died, and the twenty-five years of parasitism to which Legrimaudet had owned, classed her in that category to which the most interesting specimens of female character belong. She must indeed be a saintly creature, I thought, to have conquered this mad dog, who bites the hands of all who feed him. Curiosity, however, might not have led me to the lengths I actually went if I had not considered it all-important to obtain the assistance of this sole friend of the dying man. He was obviously very ill, and it was absolutely necessary to remove him at any cost to some suitable place, and endeavor to soothe his remaining days. I had seen too plainly the gesture with which he received my offers of assistance to attempt to renew them, and I knew of no one more likely to succeed. Would Mademoiselle Gransart be able to exercise some authority? In any case, it was my duty to ascertain. I could, of course, obtain her address from the porter at the Louvre. Behold

me, therefore, hailing a cab in front of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and as the vehicle threaded the long rue des Saints-Pères on its way to the Seine I fell, I well remember, into a mood of deepest melancholy. The strange heart of this dreadful man opened to me its inmost folds. It was that very gesture of refusal which enabled me to perceive him as a whole. Yes, self-conceit had wrecked him; but, in the first instance, it was a noble self-conceit, that of a man of talent who feels himself elected to a glorious toil. Under the influence of this illusion, of this proud estimate of his powers, — which in a truly great man is thought a sublime faith, — he had neglected to work for a living. Without a business or a craft he came to want. Brought face to face with that tragic dilemma, to die or beg, he had begged, though the cruel act had rent his soul each time his hand performed it. His literary work had followed suit. The various publications of that engine of hatred seemed to me to follow, one upon the other, with frightful logic. For, if we attempt to explain the origin of evil we are likely to end in doubting Providence, and when, after years of inward struggle, we have recovered, under the dry analyses of science, our faith in the consoling doctrine of the Unknowable, we live in dread of losing it, — of losing that faith and the hope it brings with it, — in dread of no longer being able to utter

with the same assurance the only prayer which enables us to live: "Our Father who art in heaven." How disturbing it is, therefore, to come face to face with this problem of moral ugliness and physical suffering in a man held by fate in the cruel vice of his position. We must believe that there is some mysterious meaning to this suffering universe; that the agonizing darkness of this life will pass into the light of another after death. But how tempted we are to a horrible nihilism in presence of certain shipwrecks of the soul and of destiny. These reflections, growing ever more intense, pursued me as I drove the long distance between the Louvre, where they gave me Mademoiselle Gransart's address, and the rue Boulainvilliers, at Passy, where she lived. As I made my way through the silent avenues of that peaceful neighborhood, the little houses in their little gardens, homes of bourgeois happiness, contrasted ironically in my mind with the shocking den where the old maid's friend lay dying. I thought of the old maid herself, and of the rare delicacy she must have shown to the hapless wretch, to have been able to do him such services and yet not wound him. I wondered what idea her innocent mind had formed of the most venomous spirit of our present day. Well, I should soon find out, for I was nearing the number of the house given to me by the porter of

the Louvre. The cab stopped. It was not altogether one of the little houses with a margin of a lawn the comfortable elegance of which I had been comparing with Legrimaudet's lair; it was a more modest dwelling, of the kind which presupposes the income of its tenant to be six, seven, ten, or twelve thousand francs at the utmost. The porter, who was a tailor (as a small placard written by hand duly informed me), was hard at work when I rapped on the tiled floor, mending an overcoat, which belonged no doubt to some other friend of the old maid, in easier circumstances. From the tone in which he pronounced her name in answer to my question, "Is Mademoiselle Gransart at home?" I fancied I obtained proof of unbounded respect, almost of veneration.

"Mademoiselle Gransart is out," he said; "and as it is the day when Mademoiselle dines with her brother at the Batignolles, she is not likely to be home before ten o'clock."

"Is no one in the house?"

"No one, monsieur. Mademoiselle Annette always accompanies Mademoiselle when Mademoiselle dines out."

"Will you give me something with which to write a line?" I asked, so persuaded was I of the seriousness of the case, and of the duty of at once informing the sick man's benefactress. It was not a line, but a letter which I scribbled on

the two sheets of ruled paper which the porter at last succeeded in finding in a cupboard, all the while growling: "If my wife were only here! She knows where the little one keeps his things. She has just gone to fetch him from school."

In my letter I explained Monsieur Legrimaudet's condition to Mademoiselle Gransart and gave her his address, without, be it understood, revealing the character of the house in which the poor creature lay dying. I told her, in words which must have been moving for I was moved myself in the highest degree, that she alone had enough influence over the sick man to induce him to go to some proper place. I gave her, also, my own address and that of two or three hospitals for paying patients that were known to me as decent; and, finally, I placed my own modest resources at her service for this good work. Alas! I relate all these particulars to preface an avowal which is not in keeping with the warmth of my letter. But I feel impelled to make it, if only to illustrate the sort of charity under which this poor Legrimaudet had lived and suffered. Ah, that Parisian charity, which no belief sustains, which is nothing more than an impulse of flesh and blood, how quickly it ceases to move us when the object of our emotion is out of sight! Why should we be surprised if the sensitiveness of the poor as quickly measures the shallowness of the pity of which we are so

contemptibly proud? They discern the element of hypocritical selfishness in our momentary and superficial compassion; they are ungrateful because they are clear-sighted, with a hardness of judgment which does not show, it is true, any nobility of heart, but which, nevertheless, we deserve. I was engaged to dine out and go to the theatre on the evening of the day I had been thus usefully employed. I was so taken up by this double amusement that the image of Monsieur Legrimaudet faded from my mind, and I forgot on the following day to inquire for him. The next day it was the same thing; again I was busy with the useless and multifarious occupations for which the best of us incessantly sacrifice that interest which Christian moralists so justly term Salvation — that serious and continued travail of our inner selves. In short, I let four times twenty-four hours go by without once thinking of the wretched being in the hôtel Cordabœuf. Therefore was I seized with a species of shame, that was very like remorse, when, returning from the theatre on the night of the fourth day, I found in my mail-bag the following letter, which I here transcribe without changing a word; for certain unmerited praises are sometimes the worst of satires; moreover, the little document will serve to show the truth of the old proverb: "To the pure all things are pure."

Passy, May 25th.

Monsieur, — You showed so touching an interest in the worthy and most unfortunate Monsieur Legrimaudet that I blame myself for not having sooner replied to your kind solicitude for our dear friend whom we had, alas! the grief of losing yesterday, at the hospital of the Brothers of Saint-Jean-de-Dieu, rue Oudinot, where I had taken him the preceding evening, in accordance with your excellent advice. Poverty and injustice had long preyed upon a nature which concealed, under a manner which was sometimes irritable, a touching fidelity to his old friendships, and a deep faith. Therefore, God granted to our dear friend the happiness of keeping his consciousness to the last, and of dying as a good and fervent Christian. I think that I conform to your wishes by letting you know that the funeral services will take place at the Church of Saint-François-Xavier to-morrow morning at nine o'clock. The body will be taken afterwards to the cemetery of Mount-Parnasse.

I beg you to accept, monsieur, my cordial compliments.

Éveline Gransart.

P. S. I forgot to thank you for your generous offer, which would have gratified Monsieur Legrimaudet had he known of it. I intended to tell him as soon as he was able to bear any emotion.

I remember that I remained a long time reading and rereading this letter, instead of going to

bed; for it evoked before me a drama such as life, actual life, alone affords, with personages brought from every province of the world of souls. Mareuil, with his paradoxical flippancy, Juste Dolomieu and the fervor of his honest young art, the little lame Henri and his childish brutality, — one by one they all appeared to me; next, the clients of the honorable Cordabœuf; and lastly, the noble unknown spinster to whose true charity Jean Legrimaudet owed the non-realization of his blasphemous prophecy. And I myself, with my indifference, which was sometimes sad and sometimes heedless — a good impulse had led me to contribute at the eleventh hour to the old man's redemption; for Mademoiselle Gransart could only have known through me of the illness of her life-long protégé. Well, I would at least repair my forgetfulness of the last four days by rising early the next morning and attending the funeral of the unhappy man; though without this feeling of remorse, without even the idea of fulfilling a duty, I should certainly have done so, if only for a near view of the mysterious old maid who had found it in her heart to pity and like a Legrimaudet.

On the morrow, then, I was promptly in the church, accompanied by Juste Dolomieu, whom I had sent my servant to summon with a line from me, that there might, at any rate, be two men of letters at the burial of a writer who was

leaving the world in such abject misery. I ought to say that my young friend performed this humane drudgery with a good grace, in spite of his repugnance to the miserable lampooner. At any rate, there we were, standing, with our arms crossed, in one of the chapels of the ugliest church in Paris (where there are so many ugly churches), listening to the service for the dead hastily said by a hurried priest over that melancholy coffin. Not very far from us were two women, kneeling; one of whom was evidently the servant of the other; and this other, all in black, showed as she prayed a gentle, resigned face, — of a piety so sincere that its plainness, which was rather common, seemed transfigured. Mademoiselle Gransart's blue eyes were so clear and pure, so tenderly fresh and pure, they revealed such a candor of innocence that no woman could be thought ugly with such orbs. But — must I confess it? — Mademoiselle Gransart it was I had come to see, and yet I had no eyes or thought for any one except a fifth personage who completed the little group, and who occupied a chair beside her; a man about forty years of age, clean shaved, rosy-cheeked, with an authoritative eye, a pompous mouth, very much of a man, in short, well set-up, with the shoulders of an athlete in a well-fitting overcoat of plain cloth, the classic overcoat of a solid property owner. His large

hand, gloved in black, held a small prayer-book, lent to him no doubt by one of the women of his establishment — or his establishments; for I had recognized Cordabœuf by the reserved, composed and yet protecting gesture which he made to his tenant and my companion, Juste Dolomieu. We were standing, as I have said, Dolomieu and I, with our arms crossed, in the respectful but rather unedifying attitude of freethinkers out of place in a church. Cordabœuf, on the contrary, did not miss a line of the prayers, which he read in his book; and he followed with irreproachable promptitude every movement of his neighbors. Mademoiselle Gransart knelt down, he knelt down. She crossed herself, he crossed himself. She bent her head, he bent his head, showing between his very white collar and the roots of his thick hair the nape of a butcher's neck, red and muscular. The irony of the situation went beyond words. It was decreed, however, that Monsieur Legrimaudet should go to his final rest attended by an irony still more amazing; for when mass was said, and Mademoiselle Gransart, having followed the coffin to the door, turned to make me a slight bow, I saw Cordabœuf crook his arm and offer it to the saintly creature, who accepted the support as she walked to a carriage, which she entered followed by her maid. The funeral procession (of the third class) started, accompanied by one hack-

ney coach, and as we were preparing, Juste and I, to get into our own cab and follow the body, Cordabœuf approached us.

"You intend to follow to the grave, gentlemen?" he said. "I regret very much that I cannot go. Business — you understand. It is not for me to complain, for that good lady has paid up everything, but I must say it killed the old fellow to be taken from his room. He was so comfortable with us, so gay, such a jolly dog! The women liked him so. Every day he had some lively thing or other to say, some fun to poke at us."

Such was the funeral oration delivered over Monsieur Jean Legrimaudet, who had come from Dijon to rival the fame of Bossuet; the author of several volumes, the man to whom a fortune-teller had predicted that he would die a millionnaire, a senator, an officer of the Legion of honor and famous, and who believed it!

Poor aborted being!

# III.

## TWO LITTLE BOYS.



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To Henri Laurent.

# III.

## TWO LITTLE BOYS.

### I. MONSIEUR VIPLE'S BROTHER.

One of the most exciting impressions of my childhood was the sojourn of the Austrian soldiers made prisoners during the campaign of 1859 in the provincial town where I grew up. In that gloomy town of Clermont in Auvergne, where the railroad has only lately penetrated, we were not spoiled by travellers; those who came to us were chiefly invalids on their way to Royat, still in the wilds, or to Mount-Dore and Bourboule, then difficult of access. The arrival of these vanquished enemies, with their white uniforms soiled by service and their foreign faces, was an event for the whole population, but especially for little urchins of my age (I was then seven); and I well remember with what innocently cruel curiosity we went as near as we dared to the new-comers, while they walked up and down on the terrace of the Poterne celebrated by Chauteaubriand, from which can be seen the fine line of mountains extending from

the plain of the Côtes to the massive woods of Grave-Noire. I don't know what confused images of war may flutter in the brains of children who, in this year of grace 1889, trundle their hoops along that terrace, now much changed. Where are the chains, fastened to great stone posts, which barred the way towards the cathedral? Where the rough declivity which sloped from the terrace level, the stronghold of the street boys who were the objects of my secret envy? The boys of the present day are the sons of a people on whom weighs the burden of a national defeat; but we were the children of a period still near to the imperial epic. The old men of seventy who laid their hands upon our curly heads had seen the victorious eagles re-entering France on their return from Europe; and the legend of the Napoleonic glory was still so stirring that it filled our imagination with magnificent and also, it must be owned, with comical conceits. For instance, I and my four best friends, Émile C——, Arthur B——, Joseph C——, and Claude L——, were convinced that one little French boy was stronger than two little foreign boys, no matter of what other nation they might be. Our astonishment was therefore great when we compared the brave and vigorous Austrian troopers before our eyes with the soldiers of our own country who were passing along the same paths and beneath the same trees. It bewil-

dered us to see them of the same height and with the same appearance of muscular power, — such was the foolish form of our boyish faith in the superiority of our race and nation. Eleven years later we were to pay dear for such illusions, and for others more serious though founded on a faith which was almost as childishly puerile.

I recall this sojourn of the prisoners with strange uniforms (which was in fact very brief) because another recollection is attached to it, — that of an incident which long remained mysterious to my boyish mind, and on which I still reflect with passionate interest whenever I hear a discussion on the nature of children. I must add that the person who told it to me lives in my memory as one of the most original types which I knew in this old provincial town, where my ferreting eyes were already opening to every peculiarity of countenance and to the slightest oddity of behavior. He was an old friend of my family, once actively connected with the university and now retired with the function of inspector, who answered to the somewhat fantastic name of Monsieur Optat Viple, the man being as fantastic as the name. I see him now across the vanished years, as though he were coming from the cemetery to take his accustomed walk along the Cours Sablon in the sunshine, —

very tall, very lean, his hat in his hand, with a pointed, bald head, spectacles on an endless nose, his overcoat buttoned tightly round his elongated waist, in summer as in winter, in winter as in summer, his feet encased in double-soled boots, which he never changed, even in the house, for fear of taking cold. He had kindly offered to teach me the rudiments of Latin and Greek for the pleasure of testing a method of his own, and I went every day at nine o'clock to take my lesson in his study before his dinner, which he invariably ate at ten o'clock, that he might sup (as they call it in those parts) at half-past five.

Not once since the death of his wife had the inspector broken this rule of two meals, ordered by him according to the hygienic advice of a friendly doctor, from whom he acquired a horror of alcohol, tobacco, and coffee. One bottle of wine (true Chanturge which he got from his own vineyard) sufficed him per week. But ten libraries would have been wholly insufficient to satisfy his hunger for reading. I have never known a man so possessed by a mania for printed literature. All was fish to his net, from the newspapers of his neighborhood to the local reviews, from the finest Latin authors to the worst novels of the present day; the whole interlarded daily with readings from Voltaire, out of Kehl's edition, which filled two large shelves

in his bookroom. Monsieur Optat Viple was (though it pains me to say so after this description) outrageously irreligious and jacobin, — nearly as much so as his friend, Monsieur Gaspard Larcher; and these highly respectable infidels never met without the one saying to the other, "*Homme noir*, where do you come from?" On which they would both laugh with juvenile hilarity. As for Monsieur Viple, the matter explains itself; one of his nearest relatives, his mother's brother, sat in the Convention and voted for the king's death. How he reconciled republicanism and the horror which the actual régime inspired in him with a mameluk admiration for the first Bonaparte was one of the mysteries attaching to the worthy man, who, by the bye, had a mania for extolling Nature in the style of Rousseau, apropos of his wild and dear Auvergne which he had traversed on foot in all directions. He uttered the name Jean Jacques in trembling accents. As I think of it, it seems to me hardly wise to have confided my education to this Voltairean, though he never allowed himself to interfere with the religious instruction which was given to me by others. But he talked to me, young as I was, with the utmost enthusiasm about the encyclopedists and the revolutionists. While professor at Langres after leaving the École normale, he had met a relation of Diderot's. The names of all the

writers of the eighteenth century filed through the interminable conversations he kept up with me when he took me to walk; for on fine days he would fetch me from my home and I was allowed to go with him along the roads which were strewn with the scoriæ of extinct volcanoes. We spent hours in this way, — I questioning him on a thousand childish or serious things, he replying with a kindness that never wearied; while far in the distance the Dômes profiled their masses, outlined in peaks symmetrical or rugged, and the vineyards glowed in greenery around us, with their clustering unripe grapes or their heavy purple bunches, according to the season, while the brooklets flowed beneath the willows and the unseen songsters sang — Oh, mysterious sadness of the springtide of other days!

I remember, as though it were but yesterday, the morning when my old friend related to me the incident to which I just now made allusion. As the weather seemed uncertain we had started for the Bughes, a sort of square planted with trees quite near the town and reached through the faubourg Saint-Allyre. We were just about to meet on the Poterne terrace a group of Austrian prisoners in their white uniforms, when Monsieur Viple, as if to avoid them, pulled me abruptly down the side street which leads to

Notre-Dame-du-Port, an old Roman basilica with a dark crypt. He was silent for some minutes. I looked into his furrowed face, on which the rounded point of his shirt collar was pressing, and I said to him suddenly : —

" Monsieur Viple, don't you want to look at those Austrians a little nearer ? "

" No, my child," he said, with a look I had never yet seen on his face, — full, it seemed to me, of the shadow of some dark memory, — " the last time I saw their uniform was too dreadful."

" When was that ? " I persisted.

" At the time of the invasion," he replied. Then, as if making a calculation in his head, he added, " About forty-five years ago."

" Did they get as far as Issoire ? " I asked, knowing that he came from that town.

" Yes, as far as Issoire," he answered slowly. Presently, as we were going down the road which leads to the station, he added, pointing to another, parallel road, which is called the route to Issoire : " First they reached Clarmont ; then they came direct to us. Ah ! our house was very near being burned at that time — yes, yes, even so. We did not expect them. We knew very well that the Emperor had been defeated, but we could not believe it was all over with him, — that devil of a man had won the game so often. And then, we loved him ; my father loved him ; he had seen him once review-

ing his troops in the Carrousel after the campaign of Austerlitz. How often he told us of that wonderful blue eye which forced you to cry "Vive l'Empereur!" by merely looking at you. And mind you, my boy, that Emperor was not like this present one. *He* was a man of the Revolution, a jacobin at heart, who was n't afraid of *hommes noirs*. Enough, enough!"

"But why did the Austrians want to burn your house?" I asked with the persistency of a small boy who perceives a story and does not mean to let it escape him.

"The invaders arrived one evening," continued the old man, as if he had forgotten me, and was following the visions which crowded on his memory. "They were not very numerous, — a single detachment of cavalry, commanded by a tall officer, very young, with an insolent face and a long, fair moustache which almost floated in the wind. We had spent that day in horrible anxiety. We knew the enemy were at Clermont. Would they come to us, or would they not come? How ought we to receive them? A council was held at my father's house, for he was then mayor of the village. If he had n't been so sick he was the man to put himself at the head of a determined troop and barricade the streets. Who knows whether, if all the towns and villages had done that, the allies might not have met the fate of our grumblers in Spain.

There is but one policy for an invaded people, — guerilla warfare and sharp-shooting, the taking off of the enemy head by head. Yes, we might have defended ourselves. We had provisions, and all the peasantry round about had guns hanging to a nail in their chimneys. But my poor dear father was in bed shaking with chills and fever, which he caught in the marshes of Courpières while snaring birds. So wiser counsels prevailed. Suddenly a burst of trumpets; the enemy were upon us! Ah, boy, may you never know what it is to hear the clarions sound a foreign march like that. Such superb disdain was in that blast, — disdain and hatred! How well I remember listening to it in my father's bed-chamber, my forehead against the window panes as I watched the officer caracoling at the head of his troop; and when I turned away I saw the old man weeping."

"Then you ought to be pleased, Monsieur Viple, to see those very soldiers prisoners now," I said.

"Pleased? pleased! I have no confidence in this Emperor. But enough, enough!"

This was the customary exclamation of the old jacobin, when he did not wish to say anything I might repeat, to the displeasure of my family. He continued his tale: —

"The Austrians had not been fifteen minutes in the town before they knocked violently at

our door. The handsome officer with the long moustache chose to install himself in the mayor's house in company with two others, and I was ordered to move out of my room. I can see myself still, inveighing against them and hiding a pistol which I had loaded for the defence in a sort of cupboard, which served me for a poke-away. I was furious at having to leave my room, which was the prettiest in the house; it looked out upon a terrace where I played constantly, from which a flight of stone steps covered with mosses led down into the garden. Beneath it was the billiard-room, and above a sort of attic to which I was relegated during the time the Austrian officers were in the house. They immediately ordered dinner; and as they were tired with their day's march everyone had to put his or her hand to the business of getting their meal ready at once. These three officers and six persons with them made nine, and that was a good many to provide for suddenly. However, we managed to get up a repast which my mother was anxious to make succulent. 'We must mollify them,' said the poor woman, as she sent me to the fish-pond to catch some trout, — those beautiful fresh trout I was so fond of feeling slip through my fingers as I caught them. I was also sent to the cellar for champagne; four bottles of which my father used formerly to uncork for each of the great Emperor's victories.

The supply was almost exhausted. I can't tell you my distress in having to prepare such a feast for these men with our own provisions in our own house, by this time noisy with their boisterous gayety, — the racket increasing and still increasing with laughter and the clinking of glasses as the meal went on. They drank toasts given in a language I had never heard. I listened to the noise from the kitchen, where it was decreed that we should take our own meals in the chimney corner. What were they toasting? Our defeat, no doubt, and the death of our poor Emperor. I was only twelve years old at the time, but I swear to you no one ever suffered more from anger and indignation than I did sitting on my little chair opposite to my mother. As a good housewife her mind dwelt chiefly on the breakage of the plates and glasses. 'I hope they have all they want?' she said anxiously to the servant. 'They want this, and they want that,' answered our good Michel; and this and that were accordingly sent in to them until the moment when Michel came into the kitchen with a troubled face. 'They want coffee!' he said."

"Coffee was easy enough to supply," I remarked, interrupting Monsieur Viple.

"Do you think so?" he replied. "You don't know, child, what rarities coffee and sugar were in those days. You have been told how the

Emperor had the idea of a great continental blockade for the purpose of preventing all commerce between England and the European nations. Yes, it was an idea, and a great idea, though it came to nothing. However, it had the immediate result to us of the lesser bourgeoisie of diminishing and even stopping altogether the sale of certain foreign products. So, when the servant came in with this fresh demand my mother was aghast. 'Coffee!' she cried; 'but we have n't an atom of it in the house. Go and tell them so.' Two minutes later Michel returned. 'They are drunk, madame,' he said; 'and they declare they will either have the coffee or smash everything.' 'Good God!' cried my mother, clasping her hands; 'and I have left my Sèvres set on the sideboard!'

"The racket in the dining-room increased. The officers were rapping on the floor with their sabres and shouting till the window-panes rattled. That good Michel of ours tried three several times to make them listen to reason, and three times he returned to us fairly routed by a shower of abuse. They shouted: 'Coffee! coffee!' and the mere words, pronounced in the German way, seemed a hoarse growl of savagery. At last the uproar became so loud that the sound of it reached my father's room, and presently the kitchen door opened and his tall figure,

wrapped in a brown dressing-gown, with a foulard round the head, appeared, his eyes gleaming. 'What is all this?' he said, and I saw his lips tremble as he asked the question; with fever was it, or anger? They explained the matter to him. 'I will speak to them,' he said, and he went into the dining-room. I followed him. I shall see that scene throughout my whole life, — the Austrian officers in their white uniforms, their faces flushed with drink, broken plates and bottles flung here and there upon the floor, the soiled cloth, and the smoke of their tobacco curling about the heads of our insolent conquerors. Yes, all my life I shall hear my father saying: 'Gentlemen, I give you my word of honor that I do not possess what you ask; I have risen from a sick bed to come here and ask you to respect the hearth on which I have received you as my guests." He was hardly allowed to finish before the man with the long moustache, whose blue eyes gleamed with an evil look, rose and came up to him with a goblet of champagne in his hand. 'Very well!' he said in a tolerably pure accent, which showed him to be a man of superior education to his fellows, 'we will believe you if you will do us the pleasure of drinking to our august master, who has come here to save your country. Gentlemen, we will all drink to the health of our Emperor.

"I looked at my father in terror, and, knowing

him as I did, I saw that he was in a paroxysm of anger. He took the glass; then lifting it towards the portrait of Napoleon, which the brutes had not observed, he said in a ringing voice: 'Yes, gentlemen, long live the Emperor!' The officer with the long moustache followed the direction of my father's eyes. He saw the portrait, — an ordinary engraving. Breaking the glass and frame into fragments with one blow of his sabre and refilling the glass my father had emptied, he cried, brutally: 'Come, shout, "Long live the Emperor of Austria!" and make haste about it.'

"My father took the glass, raised it again, and said, 'Long live the Emperor!' 'Ha! you French scoundrel!' shouted the officer, and catching up a chair he struck my sick father a violent blow in the chest, flinging him backward with his head against the angle of a door, while my mother and the servants and I uttered cries of horror."

"Was he dead?" I asked, interrupting the old man.

"We thought he was," answered Monsieur Viple; "for we saw the blood reddening the white handkerchief about his head. But he lived; though it took him six months to recover from the shock of that blow."

"What did you do, Monsieur Viple?" I asked.

"I?" he said, hesitating, "nothing, absolutely nothing; but my brother —"

"Your brother? you never told me about him."

"No, he died young. We were nearly of an age; he was scarcely a year older than I. After he had gone to bed in his garret (for we had the same bedroom, and both of us were exiled to the attic) he began to think — think — think. Little boys in those days, you must know, were trained to be soldiers; they heard so much of fights and dangers and cannon-balls and musquetry that there was very little they were afraid of. So after he went to bed he could think of nothing but the troubles of that miserable day, the arrival of the enemy, their entrance into the house, the preparations for dinner, the assault upon his father, the insults to the Emperor. He imagined the officer asleep in his own bed, — his, and he the son of that old man basely injured. Suddenly an idea of vengeance began to grow, to grow, in his little head. He knew the old house as you know yours in every corner of it. It was built at various times, and the skylight of the attic room to which the boy was now consigned opened upon a gently sloping roof, with a ledge or coping some seven feet below it. By walking along that ledge one could reach an ivied wall; in the wall were iron spikes which made a sort of ladder by which to reach a chimney in one direction, and in the other a second ledge from which it

was possible to get down upon the terrace which I mentioned to you. The room in which the officer slept opened upon this terrace; and so, you see, my brother got out of bed, dressed in haste, crept like a cat down the slope of the roof to the coping, then along the coping down the iron spikes to the terrace, and so to the window of his old room. 'T was a warm summer's night. The officer had closed the blinds, but not the window. My brother made sure of this by passing his little hand through the heart-shaped hole in the shutter. He stretched out his arm and felt no glass. Close to the hole was a bit of twine which served to open the shutters from within. He was brave enough to pull it. 'The worst that can happen to me,' thought he, 'is to be caught. Well, if I am, I shall say that I had forgotten something in my room and came to get it.' A foolish excuse; but the boy was possessed by an idea. The shutter creaked as it opened, but no one stirred. The officer was sleeping soundly, — stupefied no doubt by wines and liquors. His snores echoed from the room in regular cadence. With all the precautions of a thief my brother glided along the floor till he reached the cupboard where he had seen me hide that pistol. He took it out. You can fancy how his heart beat. He stayed there perfectly still a quarter of an hour perhaps, crouching on the floor, hugging his weapon,

without really knowing what he meant to do with it. The moonbeams entering through the window fell athwart the room, lighting it just enough to show a vague outline of the various objects. The officer slept on; still the same calm, unbroken sleep proclaimed by the monotonous snore. An image of his father entered the child's mind. He saw the scene of the evening; that old man raising his glass towards the portrait; the chair flung upon him, then his fall and the flowing blood. The boy half rose and crept to the bed. He could almost distinguish the features of the sleeper. He cocked the pistol — how tremendous such little sounds as that can seem in moments like these! He pointed the pistol to the corner of the man's ear, there, just there below the hair, and he fired — "

"What then?" I exclaimed, as he paused.

"Then," continued the old man, "he ran to the window, jumped the balustrade of the terrace, crept along the coping of one roof, climbed the iron spikes of the wall, and along the coping and slope of the other roof till he gained his room. Once there he closed the skylight, hid the pistol beneath his pillow, and went to bed again, pretending to sleep, while a sudden uproar filled the house, showing that the pistol-shot had wakened the household, who were doubtless searching for the murderer."

"Did they find him?"

"Never. Threats and search all failed. The Austrians wanted to burn the house down; they arrested our servants one by one, but each could show an alibi, fortunately, — my brother, too. But who would think of suspecting a child? Moreover, the dead man was hated by his soldiers and also by his superior officers."

"Ha! then he was really dead, was he? It served him right!" I cried.

"Yes, did it not? You think it was right, don't you?" asked the old inspector, his eyes glittering with a feverish recollection of a long past yet ever present memory.

"And your brother?" I persisted, "what became of him?"

"I have told you already that he died young," he replied.

Passing through Issoire a few years ago, I met, at the house of a distant relative of mine, an old lady over eighty years of age, who was a sort of cousin of my early friend the inspector. We talked of him a great deal and, in the course of conversation I chanced to say: —

"Did you know his brother?"

"What brother?" she asked.

"The one who died young."

"You are mistaken," she replied; "Optat never had a brother; he was an only son, — as I know very well, for I was brought up with him."

I then understood why it was that Monsieur Viple did not choose to cross the market-place where the Austrian prisoners were assembled. He himself was the child who had avenged his outraged father, — he, the old university professor, who since that day had probably never touched a weapon. What strange mysteries are sometimes hidden in the depths of a peaceful and humble destiny!

## II. MARCEL.

*(Extract from the Diary of François Vernantes.)*

I have given elsewhere, under the title of Madame Bressuire (see "Pastels of Women") a fragmentary tale selected from the papers bequeathed to me by my friend, the late François Vernantes. Some persons were so interested in that fragment that I believe I shall gratify their wishes by selecting from the same papers an incident of Vernantes' youth. They will find in it the same inclination to analyze and refine upon his own emotions which did such ill service to that unfortunate man. I have already explained why it did so in the few lines I gave to his brief biography, and I need not repeat the explanation here; the present introduction being merely intended to place in its true light the personal confidence made to me in the little tale, the whole interest of which (if there is any) lies in the study, too seldom attempted, of the shades of sensibility in a child's nature.

PARIS, September, 187—

How strange and, after all, inexplicable are certain friendships of our childhood which endure

but for a season and yet occupy a place in the memory of our hearts against which nothing is ever able to prevail, — neither life-long separations, nor fresh and deeper passions, nor even other memories differing in themselves and in our hearts from those which were so dear to us in distant years. Outwardly they may have changed, but no change comes to the tender feelings with which they once inspired us; they remain in some mysterious fold of our inner being, so that we continue to love them for what they were and are no longer, and by what we have been and now, alas, have ceased to be, — like mutilated soldiers who feel the fingers of a lost arm. It may be that childhood, guileless and disinterested, in all the freshness of its powers of affection which have come to no bitter deterioration through the senses, childhood with its gift of illusion and its ignorance of the future, is to friendship what the dawn of puberty is to love. As we advance in life we know better why we love the friends whom we then make; just as we find mistresses to whom we attach ourselves with the almost tragic seriousness of our riper years. But behind these friendships and behind these loves there lies a past which impels us, at times, to comparison, to keen regret, even — it may be — in the midst of happiness. Our souls, robbed of their native elasticity, cannot proceed along new ways with that ardent impulse which once

imagined but one end to a glorious road. By this time we have followed too many such ways which seemed so long and proved so short, which promised joy and led to sorrow. And yet we re-enter them, — yes, we re-enter them! Time was when we entered those paths for the first time. "Enter" and "re-enter," — there is but one syllable of difference in the two words, and yet infinitude lies between them.

These reflections, as I am well aware, convey nothing that is original; but, after all, what is there original in being a son, brother, lover, or father, in growing old and in feeling one's self grow old, in being a man in all that our present humanity contains of simple, sad, and tender? At any rate, I write them down, — *per sfogarmi*, as my dear Stendhal says, — on my return from a trip to an old town in the Île-de-France, to which I had long meditated a memorial visit, although I had spent but six weeks there, and those over twenty years ago.

This gray and solitary old town is on the borders of a great forest. A river and two canals intersect it. Why should I tell its name in this journal? Hidden from others as these, my pages, are meant to be, they might be read by indifferent eyes, and the mere thought of meaningless curiosity almost rebuffs me from writing them. I had long preserved a memory

of the decaying old town, and of the holidays I once passed there, — a delightful memory of slothful, transparent waters, meandering along their grassy bed, where the herbage scarcely bent beneath the current. Its very name, which I forbear to write, evokes for me, when I read it in a newspaper, or a railway time-table, or, it may be, in a book, the outline of ancient houses covered with brown roofs, projecting their antiquated balconies of brownish wood (always filled with flowers) over river or canal. Again I see the black mill-wheel, turning with gentle motion; its broad blades scattering a rain of drops brilliant as diamonds. The half-ruined tower of the castle, the remains of fortifications now converted into gardens, the open bell-tower of the church with its unfinished spire — how often I have dwelt in thought on all these details, and on the smiling landscape in its summer garb, — for that expression is the only one which truly renders my recollection of those half-mown wheat fields, the luxuriance of the grasses and the foliage, the warm breath of the earth exhaling upward, the luminous peace falling from the sky and enfolding all things. Such perceptions come from the virginity of sensation which belongs to childhood. Since then I have travelled through many lands; I have spent many a summer escaping Paris on the seashore, among the mountains, or in lonely

nooks of England or of Italy; and yet my one conception of summer, when I think about it, dates back to my six weeks' stay as a boy in that ancient town so truly French, close to the canals, to the river, and to the forest, — first days of liberty to a lad hitherto imprisoned, as one might say, in an apartment of the rue Saint-Honoré; six enchanting weeks, enchanted by the gain of an adolescent friendship such as in after life we never forget. Their memory was, in fact, the motive which led me to leave the train at the station of this remote and lonely town, to seek once more that well-remembered scenery and the friend I had left there, were he still living, and — my young soul!

It is well to add that this friendship of six weeks' duration, severed almost as soon as formed, was stamped on my mind by an inward drama, the various scenes of which return to my memory at this moment with so clear-cut a precision that my recollections of yesterday are not more vivid; and it is really more to relate them to myself than to philosophize on the heart's memory, its power and its deceptions, that I have seized my pen. After thirty years of age it is best to profit by every hour of *living memories*, and to fix their images, too ready to grow vague and misty, in our brains. Living, indeed, is the memory of Marcel — such was

the name of my little friend of 1855. I see myself, as we see our double in fairy tales, walking beside the cousin with whom I was spending my holidays, towards the house where I was destined to meet the first true friend I ever had. Why my father and mother decided to part with me, instead of taking me with them to certain baths, is a question I did not then ask myself, but which I answer now with, I must admit, the most calculating of bourgeois reasons. My cousin was not married; he had served in the navy with a rank which, though it did not exactly justify the title of "admiral," bestowed upon him by my family, was high enough to satisfy his ambition; and his retirement from the service, coinciding in date with the inheritance of a fine property, gave food to the imagination of my solicitous parents.

"Unless he flings his money into the river," I have heard them say a hundred times, "he must certainly have laid by a pretty pile. Our uncle left him twenty thousand francs a year. There's his pension, his cross. In that provincial town he can't spend more than six thousand francs a year, and it is fifteen years since he went there."

Silence usually followed these speeches. I have no doubt now that the hope of securing me a good place in Cousin Henry's will, led to my being sent to stay with him. On his side, he was glad to pay off, once for all, the hospitality

shown to him by my parents; for he always stayed with us when he journeyed to Paris. This old sailor with the gray eyes, which looked so keenly through their wrinkled lids, was by no means incapable of detecting my parents' scheme. But I rather think he forgave it, as I forgive certain of my own cousins who are cultivating in me, a confirmed old bachelor of forty touched in his liver, a possible codicil to my will. I only hope that they may forgive me when that will is opened, as I do the admiral, who left the whole of his eight hundred thousand francs to a naval hospital. If I had that money to-day, what good would it be to me; how could it help me now? On the other hand, were it not for the hope of that money I might not have stayed with him in that deserted old town, and I should never have known Marcel. Can a mass of material obligations ever outweigh in value the memory of a heart-warm enthusiasm?

I experienced that enthusiasm on the very first afternoon when my cousin took me to the house of Madame Amélie, — it was so that the admiral called the grandmother of my new companion. How shady that alley of acacias through which we passed to reach the house! how intense the foliage against the blue of the sky on that sweet day! I breathe again the aroma of the flowers which swayed their long racemes of pink or white among the leafage, —

last blossoms of the season. My cousin Henry told me, as we came along, the history of Marcel and his grandmother. The child had no other relation in the world; he had been an orphan for six months. What the admiral did not tell me was that he himself had formerly wished to marry Madame Amélie. No doubt he still felt for her the romantic devotion which honorable women are able late in life to inspire in the men who have loved them young. Men are so grateful to those women who by an irreproachable life have kept alive the ideal they had formed of them. It is so hard to see the woman we dreamed of at twenty-five as the companion of our destiny, lower herself morally.

Neither did my cousin Henry tell me that Madame Amélie and her husband, now dead, had quarrelled with their only son about his marriage and had never again seen him. The young man had given their name against their will to a woman whom he had picked up in Paris, and who was Marcel's mother. Of all the personages of this little domestic tragedy none survived but the boy and his grandmother. The stern anger of the lonely widow against this degrading marriage had not carried her so far as to abandon to strangers a child in whose veins a little of her own blood flowed. But the blood of *that other* mingled with it, of that girl whom her husband and she had cursed; and I was to

be a witness, though without knowing the cause, of the direful effects of this rancor surviving death, — the hardest and the most inexpiable of all the evil feelings of the heart. To those who are gone we owe that forgiveness of sins which is the noblest act of human piety, a communion in the mutual weakness of our poor nature. Madame Amélie was pious in all other ways; but ten years of suffering had told upon her and could no more be effaced from her character than the wrinkles from her thin, sallow face where the brown eyes shone with piercing lustre. The smooth, gray hair which framed a forehead hollow at the temples, the nervous contraction of the melancholy mouth, the slenderness of the withered fingers, which a pair of black lace mittens seemed to make more withered and discolored still, the ascetic leanness of her figure, the austerity of her mourning garments, all contributed to render this most worthy and respectable widow an apparition of gloom. When I first saw her, a group of lindens with lopped branches, their crowns trimmed into shape, surrounded her austere figure with a dome of foliage through which the sun was shining. The house appeared at a little distance, quite low and covered with a grape vine trained upon the walls. There was contrast and yet harmony between the melancholy widow and the soothing scene about her, — contrast, inasmuch as she symbolized too plainly the

sorrows of the soul amid the charms of happy nature; harmony, because a cloistral atmosphere issued from the stilly grove and the closed portal, which, however, opened at the voice of the old lady as she called, "Marcel, Marcel!" A boy of my own age came out; but so puny and pale was he, so weak and suffering his poor limbs, that he seemed to be younger than I by several years. His beautiful eyes of a liquid blue, which were over-large, revealed too precocious an acquaintance with mental suffering. I saw him walk towards us (he never ran), when his grandmother called him, and I heard the latter say to him in a harsh voice, —

"Where were you?"

"I was reading in the salon," replied the boy.

"You know very well that I have forbidden you to read after breakfast. It does you harm. Here is Monsieur Henry; cannot you say good-morning to him?"

"Good-morning, monsieur," said the child.

"And this is his cousin, François Vernantes, with whom you are to play."

"Yes, madame," he replied.

He called her "*madame!*" — his grandmother!

I remember that as I followed my new companion to the garden, which he had instantly and very gracefully offered to show me, I was lost in reflections on this circumstance, to me inexpli-

cable. I was so spoilt by my own two grandmammas, so accustomed to find in them the divine indulgence of an affection that was never stern, that I could not comprehend it. My curiosity was awakened and I did not repress it, so that after half-an-hour spent in making acquaintance with the roses of the *rond-point* and the rabbits in their hutch, with the long rows of fruit-trees and the stone steps leading to the canal where the linen was washed, with the growling watch-dog chained in his kennel and the cooing pigeons in the dovecot, I suddenly turned to Marcel and asked abruptly : —

"Was Madame Amélie very angry with you just now ?"

"She is always so," he answered.

"Does she always speak to you like that ?"

"Always," he replied.

"Do you always call her 'madame' ?"

"Yes," he said.

"How queer !" I persisted.

Suddenly, and just as I uttered those childish words I saw Marcel's forehead contract, his lips tremble, and a torrent of blood suffuse his cheeks. Tears rolled from his eyes.

"Ah !" he said, sobbing, "why are you, you too, so unkind ? Why do you speak like that ? I don't want you near me. Go away, go away !"

How well I remember it all ! When the trembling lips of my little friend uttered these

angry words we were standing at the lower end of the garden close to a gigantic fir-tree with a carpet of fine needles beneath it. The air was filled with the warm scent of its resin, an odor which I have never since that day inhaled without again living over this strange scene and the unreflecting, naïve impulse of pity which set me crying myself. I caught Marcel's hands and entreated him not to be angry with me; I asseverated that I had spoken thoughtlessly and I promised not to do so again. Even now, when I try to understand, through my experience as a mature man, what it was that moved me so deeply at that moment, I can only find one explanation for the sudden violence of my sympathy. Assuredly he did produce in my eleven-year-old heart the thunder-clap of a true friendship, — just as the thunder-claps of love burst upon the hearts of twenty. It was a frenzy of pure affection, which overflowed, I think, in words of moving sincerity; for the poor child ceased to sob; a gentle smile returned to his refined lips; his face, with its delicate features, glowed with a sparkle of gratitude. His whole soul was so sick and weary, poor orphan that he was with those too thoughtful eyes, that this outburst of a generous affection was infinitely sweet to him. He replied to me with touching sympathy, and in less than half an hour from the time he had so angrily turned upon me we were

sitting side by side beneath the gigantic tree and I was saying to him, —

"Will you be my friend?"

To which he answered, —

"Yes, I will; but you must have no other."

We kissed each other, to seal this pledge of sudden friendship, and then, with the amazing rapidity of feeling which belongs to that vibrating age, we began to make arrangements for the future. We agreed to say "thee" and "thou," to have no secrets between us, to stand by each other on all occasions, to meet every day and play with no other boys during the holidays. In short, it was one of those sudden entrances into an idyl of elective brotherhood, such as we may all have known in the dawn of youth. Good God! how severe and yet how true is the saying of a celebrated writer when he speaks of his *developtée* soul of fifty, — faded and worn at fifty only! He was of a past generation, while we, the sons of the middle of this century, lose at fifteen, and beyond recovery, the velvet bloom of our inner being, thanks to our guilty reading. I myself, how early I became worn out!

I have spoken of brotherhood; but in truth I never had a brother. So I gave that noble name to my new friend, and with the name that portion of my heart's affection which might have gone to a brother younger and smaller than my-

self, one to be wrapped and held in the warm tenderness of protection. The muscles of this son of a father and a mother dying young were far too delicate for the bodily exercise which is the base of all boyish amusements; in fact, he was disinherited of physical existence. So, during the six happy weeks when we were allowed to roam together, like two inoffensive animals set for a time at liberty, between the garden of Madame Amélie and the park of my cousin the admiral, it was I who took pride in sparing him all effort; I who lifted the heavy stones when we dammed the brook; I who took the oars when we floated down the canal in a boat (against the repeated orders of my cousin and his grandmother); I who climbed the trees to gather fruit and take a deserted bird's-nest; I who scaled the rocks for a bunch of wild flowers. I rejoiced in my vigor. In the visions of far-distant adventure which we imagined after reading a book of travels which I had won as a prize, it was I who was elected to supply by my labor and industry the wants of our community of two.

"We shall live on my hunting," I told Marcel.

"Oh, that will be good," he replied; "when will that time come? I am so unhappy here."

It was indeed true that the poor frail boy was unhappy; he endured in that house and beside his grandmother one of those subtle forms of suffering of which we might surely suppose that

youth was unsusceptible. But in my humble opinion youth is more sensitive to such suffering than maturer age, whenever, as sometimes happens, its frenzied power of imagination turns to torture. During the interminable conversations which filled the intervals between our games Marcel recovered a superiority over me which resulted from his precocious gift of feeling, developed by his sensitive delicacy. What hours we spent lying in the shade of a boat, or curled up on the steps to the canal watching the lazy water; he telling me his sorrows, I listening to them. They all came from the passionate attachment he bore his mother, who died when he was nine years old, just fourteen months before his father. He described to me her sick-room (she was consumptive), his long sittings in that closed chamber, occupied in some silent amusement, fearing to wake her if she dozed. He pictured her so pale, never leaving her bed, and coughing, always coughing. He told me how he saw his father weeping; and how he overheard, he, Marcel, a conversation among the women-servants who stated that the doctor said she could not live a week. He described his own self, with his forehead against the window panes, gazing into the street, — one of those Parisian streets which I happened to know well; always noisy and full of life, but then covered with straw that the sound of the carriages might be deadened, and

not disturb her dying moments. With what sadness he made me share in his last vigil beside the dead, and hear the details of her funeral. Since then I have read hundreds of such tales, with my passionate taste for personal memoirs and correspondences. None has ever touched me like the simple words in which my little friend pictured that death scene, with his blue eyes fixed in space, which was filled for him with those melancholy images. Then he told of the dinners alone with his father, who would suddenly weep as he looked at him, and who often came to kiss him in the night-time, saying, "Oh, my poor Marcel!"

"Yes," said the strange child, "poor Marcel, truly. When papa died and my grandmother came to take me you don't know how I trembled. Mamma had so often spoken of her and told me she would never love me. 'She hates me,' she said. Why? If you had known mamma, and how beautiful she was even though she was ill, with her golden hair so long, so long, and her eyes so blue, so blue, you would never have believed that any one could hate her, — but it was all true; my grandmother hates her still, and me too because I am like her. Just think, the very first day she said to the servant, 'Take away those portraits,' pointing to the photographs of my poor mamma which stood on the table. Ah! then I understood how she hated her. And just

because of that I have never been able to thank her, really thank her — no, I could n't! She is good to me, I know, very, very good. But when she looks at me, when we are alone, I feel she sees mamma and I turn cold. Oh! how cold it makes me. And then I long to run away, to get to Paris and see the grave where they have put her. My papa is not with her, they brought him here. My grandmother would have it so, and I am sure he comes back at night to reproach her, for she can't sleep. She comes into my room; she thinks I am asleep; I am so afraid of her that I shut my eyes. I know she is looking at me and I 'm afraid she will hear my heart beat, for it makes such a noise! Oh! if you could only see the pretty garden they have planted over mamma; it is all roses. I always went there twice a week with my papa. It is on a little hill in the cemetery of Père-Lachaise. Did you ever go there? Oh! how I wish I could go back there once more!"

I must feel very sure of my memory or I could scarcely believe now that Marcel did really speak and feel thus; and I must also summon all my knowledge as to the romantic spirit which belongs to childhood before I can understand that such conversations, constantly repeated, should have ended, towards the close of my stay, in the project which we actually planned, Marcel and

I; or rather, he planned it alone and brought me into it, as Orestes brought Pylades, in the mythology of which our heads were full, to the scheme of abducting Iphigenia.

Madame Amélie's fête-day was close at hand. My little friend confided to me a few days before that event that he had prayed God so hard, so hard, to help him that an inspiration had come to him from those prayers. I ought to add that we had just made our first communion, and our religious fervor was so intense that our chimerical visions of a hunter's life in America alternated with that of entering the same convent as soon as we were grown men. Marcel's inspiration from on high bore a fatal resemblance to the prank of a naughty boy; for it was nothing else than to run away from home, — the object, however, having nothing in common with boyish mischief. We were to go to Paris, visit the cemetery of Père-Lachaise, and return in time for the birthday fête.

"And," continued Marcel, "I shall bring my grandmother a bunch of roses from mamma's grave, and I shall tell her mamma sent them, and I shall ask her to give me back the portraits and to love me."

"Yes, I'll go with you," I cried, without stopping to discuss the practicability of this romantic proceeding which roused my enthusiasm. Neither did Marcel discuss my resolution to

follow him. We set our minds at once to discover some practical means of getting out of the old town and reaching Paris. The distance was about fifty miles. In those days the journey was made by a yellow diligence with four horses. We saw it daily driving away in clouds of dust, with its imperial full of peasants in their blue blouses, while the coupé and the interior were filled with bourgeois. We never dreamed of taking this antiquated conveyance, because, in the first place, the conductor knew our families, and in the second, our combined purses produced only four francs. We were honest little boys, and it never occurred to us to obtain more money by illegitimate means. I therefore submitted for Marcel's judgment a calculation which, all things considered, seemed to both of us unassailable.

"It will," I said, "take us one hour to go two and a half miles, won't it? We tried that the other day. Therefore it will take us twenty hours to do fifty miles. Consequently, if we leave here at nine o'clock at night we shall be in Paris the next afternoon. You can get your roses. We will sleep at my house; there is no one there but old Susan, the maid, who won't turn us away. We can start to return after breakfast and we'll be back here just in time for your grandmother's fête."

I am sure that I never in my life have felt such a glow of exultation as that which supported my youthful courage on the warm and balmy September night when I slipped out of bed, then out of the house, and next, out of the admiral's park to join my accomplice. I found him sitting on a milestone, chosen as the place of rendezvous. We clasped hands without a word and started. The moon was lighting the broad landscape with that almost supernatural light which throws into strong relief the weird outline of surrounding objects. Under other circumstances my companion and I would certainly have not felt easy in crossing, all alone, a dark forest, which the breeze, soft but incessant, was filling with mysterious murmurs. The belated cartmen and the postman whom we encountered would undoubtedly have seemed brigands all ready to attack us. Even in broad daylight we were neither of us over-brave in presence of a dog in the street, and we met at least ten running with their noses to the ground in search of something. But phantoms, thieves and dangerous beasts did not enter our heads; we thought only of our scheme and its object, and during the first hours, that is, until the dawn broke we kept faithfully to the programme, — so much that by the first gleam of light I was able to read on a milestone that we were only twenty-five miles from Paris. It was, in short,

no dangerous adventure that stopped us on the gray road to the capital which now lay stretched before our eyes like an endless ribbon. We had not reckoned on the immense fatigue a night of forced marching and want of sleep would bring upon us. At the end of the next mile we were obliged to sit down on a pile of hay. At the end of two more our eleven-year-old legs refused to stir. I see us now, lying worn out, side by side, Marcel sobbing with despair. But why relate the absurd mortifications of our epic, which ended like the famous first essay of the great hidalgo, the Knight of the Sad Countenance, and his faithful squire, by a return to the old town (and to punishment) in one of the carriages sent in search of us by the admiral as soon as our absence was discovered in the morning. How terrified we now were by the unknown men whom we met on the road along which we had passed so calmly during the night. Surely they knew our history; and how could we explain to them the real reason of our flight, sitting there in a hired tilbury driven by a man who seemed to be jeering at us, as though we were a pair of thieves. But such fears were nothing compared to the expectation of our meeting with Madame Amélie and my cousin. When at last I stood in presence of the latter and heard him say, 'Do you mean to explain your conduct before I send you back to your

father?' I became a coward, so base a coward that, for the first and last time of my life, I was driven to treachery. Yes, I betrayed my friend. I had solemnly sworn to him that I would never reveal to any human being his confidences about his grandmother. But I did reveal them now; I repeated our conversations about his dead mother, and I told the secret of our flight and our intention to return after visiting the cemetery. The face of my judge — that rugged bronzed face, redolent of sea-life — expressed as he listened to me a benign astonishment which encouraged me to hope.

"Ask Madame Amélie to forgive Marcel," I implored him. "Tell her it was all my doing; find some excuse. Oh, I entreat you, cousin, don't let her ever know what I have told you. I promised Marcel I would never tell. If she knows she will be more angry than ever. Punish me as much as you like, but don't send me back to Paris. Let me finish my holidays with him. He has no one but me."

"I shall do what I think right," said the admiral in a kindlier tone, which I took to be a promise of forgiveness. So, when I went to bed, after a supper to which my appetite as a tramp did justice in spite of my distress of mind, I slept peacefully and soundly. But what a waking it was in the morning as the first rays of light filtered through the cracks of the

blind, recalling me to the recollection of my double wrong-doing, — to my cousin, for running away; to my friend (and this was dreadful) for betraying his secret. My imagination, which throughout my life has afflicted me with the worst view of all events, had, by the time I saw the admiral again, suggested to me every possibility of evil. Yes, I had foreseen everything, except precisely the thing that happened.

"Come," said my cousin Henry, stroking my clipped head with his knotty hand after his usual fashion, "run round to Madame Amélie's and ask how Marcel feels."

"Is he ill?" I cried.

"It is nothing, nothing," he answered, "he is rather weak, that's all, — and devilish good reason for it, too. Go at once; he wants you."

Not one word about our flight; no allusion to punishment! The explanation soon came when I entered the room of my little friend and found Madame Amélie sitting beside his bed, — but Madame Amélie transfigured, with a smile of pity upon her pale lips, the light of feeling in her brown eyes, tenderness in the gesture with which she stroked her grandson's cheeks as she said to him, —

"You feel better, dear?"

"Yes, grandmamma," he answered.

And he looked with rapture at a portrait lying beside him, — one of those daguerrotypes

which we find among our family relics, bright and blurred at the same time when exposed to the light. An expression of ineffable joy and faith illumined that suffering face. Grandmother and grandson were both so absorbed, she in stroking those poor thin cheeks, he in contemplating his mother's portrait, that they did not hear me enter. But I did not need any words to tell me that the admiral had repeated my confession to the grandmother, and that in that aged heart the knowledge of the mute suffering of the child, hitherto supposed ungrateful, had triumphed over the old woman's hatred of the dead; and the little daguerrotype lying on the sheet was the pledge of a sacred reconciliation.

Such were the memories I sought to revive, after an absence of many years in that ancient town of the Île-de-France, where not a stone has changed. The clear waters of the little river where the black fish dart still flow between their grassy banks. The two canals move sluggishly between the tow-paths. The barges, with their low, wooden houses, geraniums adorning their tiny windows, which set our youthful fancy dreaming, still glide along those monotonous water-ways with the same even, unhasting motion. The moment I left the station (the only new building in the stagnant town, happily beyond the walls) I beheld again the ancient

castle, the open clock-tower of the church, the bridge, my cousin's house, and then that other house, — of Madame Amélie. Who lives there now? The one which sheltered the admiral's last years I knew had passed to strangers. The good man died only four months after I left him, — a painful parting which made my little friend and me shed many tears and promise a correspondence, which lasted scarce a year! I have never seen him again, my six-weeks' friend. Months passed, then years, and I did not receive from him, neither did I give him, any sign of existence. Is he still living? Is it he who now occupies that house of Madame Amélie, the blinds of which (still painted gray) I see beyond the lindens, trimmed as ever? And if he lives what is he now? Does any trace of that romantic soul which made him once so deeply dear to me remain? I myself have changed so much since then — changed to darkness, to sadness; I am so belittled, if I must own the truth.

Instead of ringing the bell of the closed gate, I seated myself on a bench by the canal where I could see the terrace, our terrace of other days, the flowing water, image of our lives, scarce bending the soft herbage, our herbage, our water! And then — I came away, not seeking to know whether Marcel was still of this world, nor whether he lived in the old town, nor indeed

anything of his present being. Why find in a provincial bourgeois, full of notions, the delightful child who was my friend? Why prove to myself that the most exquisite of our poets was right when he said: —

> "I dread the scoffing adieu
> Men fling to dreams of youth"?

A sad law, but too real, that in friendship, as in love, it is best to remember alone, not with another, if we wish to remember tenderly.